

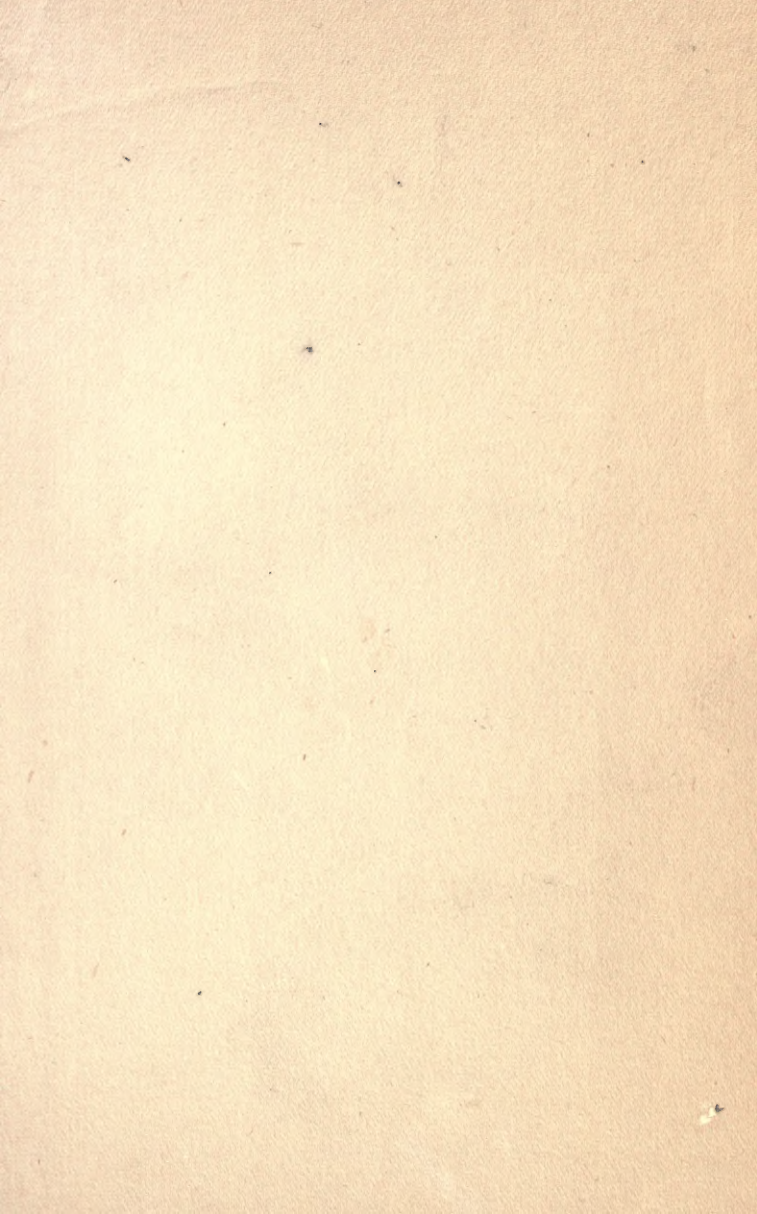
'AS A WATCH
IN
THE NIGHT'

MRS. CAMPBELL
PRAED



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AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT

'AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT'

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

ON

'AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT'

'Mrs. Praed has attempted, and well-nigh achieved, the impossible. In her new book, "As a Watch in the Night," she has realized a new departure: she has written a mystic novel on reincarnation, which is yet neither wearisome, banal, nor ludicrous. It is a considerable achievement. . . . The writer impresses upon us very picturesquely the fascinating theory of a plurality of lives; and, to this end, she, like Mr. Kipling and others, chooses as her "fixed point" the world of modern fashionable London; as her chief actor, a typical member of restless, prosaic London society. . . . There can be no doubt that the authoress lends much enchantment to the theory advocated by Shelley and Wordsworth about our life being "but a sleep and a forgetting." . . . The whole thing is very dramatic. . . . Altogether, the book is one that leaves a distinct impression; it is powerful, interesting, and well proportioned.'—*Daily News*.

'It reveals much learning, much familiarity with human nature, motive, and impulse, and an undoubtedly large measure of skill in conjuring up the past. Indeed, Dorothea sometimes appears to the reader as a convenient medium by which to unfold to the reader the author's views and perceptions of life and of history.'—*Scotsman*.

'Mrs. Campbell Praed has always exhibited a praiseworthy desire to be unconventional in her choice of *motifs* for her stories, and in "As a Watch in the Night" she is, in that respect, more successful than on any previous occasion . . . those who like to dabble in mysticism will find that in "As a Watch in the Night" the writer has composed a story fertile in imagination, compact of abnormal incident presented in a thoroughly up-to-date setting—a device productive of some really startling contrasts.'—*Globe*.

'Reincarnation, the adapted Buddhism which calls itself esoteric, is the theory which a story of modern life is used to exemplify. . . . The story is of a woman-artist who for years has been the adored friend of one man and the mistress of another. And we are happy to add at once that we are thoroughly satisfied with Mrs. Dorothea Queste, with Gavan Sarel (her lover), and with the charming Kaia (though she does sing "a wild sort of melody inexpressibly plaintive"), out of jealousy for whom Dorothea in the end compasses the ruin of Sarel's political career.'—*Academy*.

'It is a long and very curious story, and may be commended to those who like a good deal of mysticism with their fiction.'—*Navy and Army Illustrated*.

'Mrs. Campbell Praed knows how to create a strong situation, and has the courage necessary to treat it with perfect candour. . . . Her best qualities are all to be found in "As a Watch in the Night" . . . one of the most ambitious themes on which she has ever ventured. With a lavish hand she has crowded into a single volume enough dramatic situations for half a dozen ordinary novels. . . . Had it been less strenuous, less highly coloured, in a word, less sensational, Mrs. Praed's novel, which is assured of a popular success, would have ranked high as literature.'—*Standard*.

'An extremely clever socio-political novel. The story unfolded to us is both brilliant and dramatic, witty in conversation, and artistic in its details. . . . It is a notable book, and should add to the reputation of a clever and attractive writer.'—*Review of the Week*.

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'In her latest novel, "As a Watch in the Night," Mrs. Campbell Praed takes for her purpose the familiar theme of reincarnation; and it must be confessed that, unlike many other authors who have written round this engrossing subject, Mrs. Praed has given us a romance at once fresh, if not original, interesting, and thoroughly natural.'—*Echo*.

'Mrs. Campbell Praed's new story is probably her most ambitious work.'—*Spectator*.

'The idea is effective and original, and Mrs. Campbell Praed works it well. . . . The book is clever . . . there is plenty of intelligence and go in it, and it is much more interesting than the generality of novels.'—*St. James's Gazette*.

'A strong and fascinating story . . . strangely attractive.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

'AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT'

A DRAMA OF WAKING AND DREAM

IN FIVE ACTS

*PRAED, Rosa Caroline (Murray-
Prior) Mrs. Campbell Praed.*

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED

AUTHOR OF

'CHRISTINA CHARD,' 'MRS. TREGASKISS,' 'MADAME IZAN,' ETC.



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' For a thousand years are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a
watch in the night. '

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THE FIRST ACT
ARTIST AND MYSTIC

SCENES

IN THE WAKING LIFE

AN old man, and a woman, attractive, but no longer young, stood at the large window of a studio in Chelsea, looking out on the Thames.

‘Oh yes,’ she was saying, ‘the river is melancholy enough and mysterious enough to mean anything. It is like fate. I often think so, as I sit here and watch the boats and steamers and things glide past and disappear in the mist. But I did suppose, Mr. Charafta, that you would hit upon a more original metaphor than that. I wonder how many people have told me that the river is like life and destiny and all the rest of those hackneyed facts?’

The old man smiled. He had a very sweet smile, with the suggestion of deep thought behind it.

‘The world is too old,’ he said. ‘There are no new metaphors, and nothing is original which is true.’

‘Here!’ exclaimed she laughingly, striking her chest with the tips of her nervous, pointed fingers, ‘allow me to show you a contradiction of that statement. I believe it is commonly declared among my friends and acquaintances that there is only one Dorothea Queste. They are good enough or bad enough to say that I am like nobody else; therefore I suppose I must be an original work of the Creator. But, alas! I am not true.’

The old man's eyes, dark and unusually brilliant, looked at her searchingly from beneath his bushy gray eyebrows.

'I accept the contradiction,' he answered, 'up to a point. Certainly you are not always true, and I admit that the world holds but one Dorothea Queste; nevertheless——'

'Well! Nevertheless? Say what you think.'

'You may seem to the ignorant observer, as you say, an original work of the Creator, and that is true; yet this woman, Dorothea Queste, may be only a copy of something which existed a long time ago. A slightly altered copy, still a replica.'

'A replica,' she repeated musingly, 'a copy of something—of somebody, you mean, who existed a long time ago. How curious that you should have put that thought into words! It is one which has so often occurred to me.'

'That you existed long ago?'

'Yes. And talking of the river, some such river as this always seems to come into that former existence. That is the reason, perhaps, why I had such a longing to fix myself by the Thames.' She pointed out over the Embankment. 'The river has a fascination for me—almost as great a fascination as old monasteries, and ruined cathedrals, and gray stone walls, and olive-trees.'

'Do you remember the other river?' asked Charafta.

'It was a turbid, sullen sort of stream, running yellow in patches. And it had all sorts of queer craft going up and down and moored by its banks—clumsy ships and barges, and unmanageable galleys——'

'How do you know they were unmanageable?' he interrupted.

'Because—oh! you remember—there were sand-banks, and the current ran so strong. The oarsmen were stupid, too. And, then, they were so overloaded—the boats—with

great blocks of marble, and quantities of wheat, and animals, and heaps of things. You know all that.'

Her voice was dreamy, and had a touch of impatience, as though she took it for granted that what she described would be equally familiar to him, so that she did not want to be hindered by questions. Her eyes, he noticed, had that peculiar glazed look which one sees in the eyes of a clairvoyant. He knew the look quite well, but had never before seen it in the eyes of Dorothea Queste. He watched her face with an expression of satisfaction as she gazed away from him, absently, over the fog-shrouded reach between Chelsea and Westminster Bridges. No doubt her imagination had been stirred by the sombre mystery of that leaden flood, with its wrack and drift of boats and barges, and the huge coal-hulks, which in this indistinct light seemed like uncanny monstrosities. To the southwest were lurid gleams where the sun was setting; the pillars of the nearest bridge and the fantastic pattern of its many chains, as they dipped, zigzagged and interlaced in apparently purposeless fashion, were drawn quaveringly upon the reddened sky. There was, indeed, something darkly suggestive in the whole scene—houses, towers, river, bridges and boats, all melting upward into the brooding redness of the sky, and downward into the gloom of the great city.

'Yes, I know that,' said Charafta. 'Please go on.'

'The stream was against them—those overloaded galleys—and the rowers would get so excited and dazed by the crowd and noise on the shores that they would lose their heads. But the outgoing ships were carried down easily, as the tide now is carrying along those Dutch luggers with the red sails. Only on *my* river the banks and wharves and buildings were not swallowed up in fog. All was sunshine there, and bustle and life. Such life! Coarse, brutal, down away by the river, but the people enjoyed

it ; and it was grand and stirring up in the splendid city. Oh, it *was* life ! And I have wanted so, as I watched it, to live it all over again.'

'You have seen all that, then, with, as you suppose, these bodily eyes ?'

'I have seen it. . . . I see many things. . . . I don't know whether with these bodily eyes. . . . I see it in a kind of inward way.' She spoke hesitatingly, and as though something in him impelled her, almost against her will, to confidence. 'Sometimes, after a long day's work, as I sit here and look over the water, a curtain seems to lift, and it is as though *this* life I am living were merely a sort of drop-scene, and that the real play is hidden away behind it. Call my visions overwrought fancy, Mr. Charafta'—and she turned her eyes on him, now bright and animated—'but I assure you I have had strange proofs——'

'I don't call them overwrought fancy,' he replied quietly, 'and I should like to know something about your proofs. Do you mean proofs that your visions had once been actual occurrences ?'

'I want you to look at this, and tell me if you know what it is.'

She took out a brooch of curious Etruscan design which fastened some lace upon her bodice, and handed it to him.

'This was found,' he answered, 'or its prototype, at the last Pompeian excavation. It was the first discovered of that pattern. I was present at the finding. I don't know how you come to have had it copied already.'

'And that's just the thing. This brooch was made from my own drawing five years ago. I must tell you that it was . . . I saw a woman wearing it.'

'In one of your visions ?'

'Yes ; but that's nothing. If I were to tell you the other things——'

'I beg you to do so.'

‘Not now. Some other day, perhaps. I don’t talk about my visions ; I only draw them. Yet I fancied the first time I saw you that you would understand, and might be able to explain some things which have always puzzled me.’

The old man bowed, half assentingly, half interrogatively. He was quite an old man—far too old for the most scandal-loving tongue to insinuate that his evident interest in Dorothea Queste was that of a lover. Augustus Charafta, judging from his appearance, could not have been much under eighty ; but he had lived, it was said, an adventurous life in wild lands and unhealthy climates, which may have partly accounted for his look of advanced age. Though he claimed to be an Englishman—and, indeed, Charaftas had owned a small property in Cornwall for several generations — his name and physical type seemed more Eastern than European. Here was an Arab strain, one would have said—the fez which covered his baldness above a scanty fringe of white hair perhaps suggesting the notion. Very likely, as in the case of certain English families, there was gipsy blood in his veins, and to this may have been due a certain eccentricity in his ways and his love of wandering. Yet he was not by any means of unsocial habit, and in London many doors difficult as well as easy of access were open to him. He seemed to stretch out feelers in all directions, and was at home in Bohemia as he was at home in Mayfair. Artists greatly admired Augustus Charafta, and not a few wished to paint him. Dorothea Queste was one of these, but she had not so far summoned the courage to ask him to sit to her. It was a fine face, with its venerable beard, its piercing eyes, and intellectual forehead. But the effect of this prophet’s head was a good deal spoiled by its being set upon an insignificant frame, quite out of keeping with so impressive a personality.

‘Does it not strike you,’ he remarked, ‘that the whole

history of civilization concentrates itself more or less in that of three great rivers—Nile, Tiber, and Thames ?

'Tiber,' she repeated. 'Yes, of course, it must be the Tiber of which we have been talking.'

'Have you ever been in Rome ?' he asked.

'No. By a sort of fatality, it would seem, every time I have gone to Italy I have been turned back before reaching Rome. There's a confession for an artist ! My art education, such as it is, began and ended in Paris.'

'Surely an art education is never ended.'

'No, you are right. That is what Alaric tells me.'

'Your son is following your example, and studying, too, in Paris ?'

'He did study in Paris, and was very successful ; but for the last nine months he has been painting in the East. I am expecting him back any day now. By the way, he wants a studio, if you should happen to hear of one in this neighbourhood. . . . But,' she added, 'Alaric would not like you to say that he is following my artistic example. Technique is Alaric's strong point, and he says I have none.'

'You have managed to make a name for yourself without it, then,' replied Charafta. 'Anyhow, if you fail in technique, you have what is far greater—inspiration. Though, do not think that I accept your son's estimate as correct.'

'I want to ask you,' she said abruptly, 'why did you agree so readily with me just now that I am untrue ? Of course, it was only with a half-intention that I took up what you said about nothing original being true. There was no logic in my comparison. But you answered me with conviction ; and surely you have seen too little of me to be able to form a judgment on my character.'

'I have seen enough,' he answered, 'to convince me that you act one life and live another.'

A faint flush came over the warm pallor of Dorothea's cheek, and her brown eyes quailed slightly beneath his

penetrating gaze, then were lifted again with something of the appealing look of a startled fawn.

‘I see,’ she said slowly. ‘Yes, I was right in thinking you would understand. You do understand. Oh, don’t go!’ she added hurriedly, as a rustle of silk behind the tapestry screening the door of the studio announced the arrival of other visitors. ‘I am “at home” this afternoon. A poor artist must do that sort of thing, or there would be no orders; and one can’t live on the illustrations of Lord Ravage’s books. Please stay. I want to talk to you by-and-by. You’ll find something of interest, perhaps, in those sketches;’ and she pointed to a portfolio on a stand close by.

Charafta subsided into the recess of the window, and Dorothea went forward to receive her guests. They strolled in by twos and threes—a sort of representative gathering from all classes of London society. Among them were fashionable women, bringing, perhaps, a male loiterer or two of the typical kind, and, as was to be expected, cleverer than fashionable women usually are. Also some successful artists and authors; a small sprinkling from the diplomatic set and the world of journalism, and a few of those men of culture who make a profession of society as well as of letters. It was an interesting little throng, and Dorothea held it well in hand. She had the art of making people natural, which is the secret of a popular hostess.

The talk was not mere art jargon, but a blend of society babble, intellectual conversation and political gossip. A good many of the people seemed to know each other intimately, and picked up threads, as is the way in London, from the point where they had dropped them that very morning or the previous evening. Yet those who were outside this sphere of intimacy were not made oppressively conscious of the fact, but were accepted on their merits,

and admitted within the circle as persons who must have done something noteworthy, or be in some manner worth cultivating, else they would not be friends of Mrs. Queste.

The studio was a big room with many nooks and corners, and a gallery along one end, beneath which stood the tea-table, against a becoming background of old Flemish tapestry. Perhaps it was because the background was so becoming that there were always several pretty girls ready to pour out tea and chocolate at Dorothea's 'afternoons.' And they were not exactly the kind of girls one might expect to find thus officiating in an artist's studio, but seemed of the sort which confines itself chiefly to the drawing-rooms of Belgravia and Mayfair—well-groomed, sweetly self-confident, high-bred-looking young ladies, who had the most delightful manners and affable smiles, even for the outsiders, yet at the same time a certain indefinable haughtiness that forbade a too-easy taking of things for granted.

To-day there were two of these superior beings busying themselves over Dorothea's teacups. One was dark, romantic in style, rather of the Book of Beauty, stately type, with waved hair parted on her forehead, a refined oval face, deep violet eyes, usually half veiled by curiously thick lashes, but which, when she opened them wide, seemed to belie the cold perfection of her features and the reserved sweetness of her lips. This young lady was in reality a widow, and was addressed generally as Lady Rosalys, or Rose, and by Dorothea as Alys. The other was a girl exquisitely fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed, of aristocratic bearing, and with a distant but enthralling smile. She had, however, an air of naïve curiosity, and was easy to get on with. She was dressed with expensive simplicity, and shed the scent of fresh violets from her lace and sables.

This fair girl—Winnie, as they called her, otherwise Miss Tolvean—had come in with a little old lady in a poke bonnet, who wore her crinkly white hair in a series of puffs on each side of her face, and whose garments of incongruous shapes and hues gave one the idea that they had been chosen at random from the wardrobe of a lady of quality of the early Victorian epoch. From the way people crowded round this old lady, it was evident that she was a person of consequence. She had very bright dark eyes, and a sprightly manner, and seemed to know everybody and everything. Almost her first remark to Dorothea was:

‘Have you seen Ravage to-day?’

‘No,’ answered Mrs. Queste.

‘I hoped I should find him. I want to know what he thinks is going to happen. I hear there was a wild storm raging last night at the House.’

‘Of course you saw that the Government majority had been brought down to ten. It’s the closest thing done yet,’ put in a pretty, eager, political lady, the wife of a Radical member.

‘Oh, if Ravage chooses, now is his chance,’ said the white-haired old lady.

‘Will he choose?’ said Dorothea.

‘Ah, will he? You should know that better than I. One thing is certain: he can’t carry on unless he joins forces with Sarel. But though goodness knows that the House of Lords wants reforming badly enough, and we’re ready to become Progressivists to save our souls, we ain’t quite ready yet, I fancy, for glorious martyrdom. Ravage wouldn’t agree to that item of the Progressivist programme.’

‘Lady Tregellis,’ put in one of the men listening to her, a lath-like, academic-looking person, ‘you have forgotten the promise you made me.’

'I make so many,' said the old lady ingenuously. 'Which one was it?'

'That you would get hold of Gavan Sarel, and telegraph to me to come and meet him. I'm ready to leave Oxford at a moment's notice, and to give up my most important engagement, for the chance of ten minutes' talk with the coming man.'

'Oh, you think he *is* the coming man?' said a Guardsman, who was handing sandwiches, and had come in attendance on Lady Rosalys.

'He will not come till Ravage has gone,' declared Lady Tregellis. 'And we really can't hoist up a new flag. He'll have to modify his views, and sail under one of the old ones. Sir Oscar, I'll have one of those sandwiches, please. Where does the nice woman get her receipts for all these delicious things? My dear Everard Cleeve'—and she turned from her sandwich to the Oxford Don—'first catch your hare. I haven't caught Sarel. He positively refuses to dine out, lunch out, or even to meet an ugly old woman at tea on the Terrace.'

An extremely pretty and very much made-up little lady, the wife of another member of Parliament, who was also a noted journalist, having just said good-bye to Dorothea, paused at the last words to remark :

'Now, Lady Tregellis, it's all very well for you to pose as a hundred, and hideous; but you know that you've got more scalps to show than any of us.'

The old lady nodded with the air of a benevolent witch.

'Not so many as you, my dear. Really, it's an extraordinary thing,' and she turned to a tall, blue-eyed woman, very untidily dressed, and with the innocent expression of an overgrown child: 'there are plain women who have the power to fascinate every man they come across, and there are pretty women who go through life without ever having had a declaration. It's not a question of beauty, it's not

a question of cleverness, and decidedly it's not a question of morals. Isn't that so, Angela?"

The heavenly-eyed woman laughed uncomprehendingly. She looked as if she had strayed down from another sphere, and her name, Angela, seemed appropriate. Lady Tregellis smiled again on the pretty woman who had challenged her about her scalps.

'We're coming to you this evening,' she said. 'Your parties are so amusing. It's like reading the *Torch* before your husband has edited it. Tell Mr. Olver that I'm dining at a Tory house, so that I shall need a good dose of Radicalism as a corrective.'

Mrs. Olver departed, carrying off an Attaché belonging to the French Embassy whom she had annexed, and throwing back smiles as she went. The heavenly-looking lady gave a little cry of pleasure.

'Oh, there's Mr. Charafta!' she exclaimed, making for the window. 'I do want to speak to him!'

'Angela,' said Lady Rosalys, 'you've had no tea. Does your high-priest, or whatever you call him, allow you to eat pâté-de-foie-gras puffs?'

Angela Winterbourne escaped, Lady Tregellis calling after her:

'Now, my dear, I don't mean you to keep a nice little secret society all to yourself. I've been behind a good many mysteries in the course of my adult life, and I intend to know all that's worth knowing about your Servers.'

'You won't find that so easy,' said Lady Rosalys. 'They're under a vow. You must first learn the password, and then you must be illuminated. Isn't that so, Mr. Cleeve? You are an authority on ancient religions, and the Rosicrucians, and that kind of thing. Only think of there being Rosicrucians in London to-day!'

'Oh, but I'm not interested just now in Rosicrucians,' plaintively returned Mr. Cleeve. 'And as for the number

of mystic societies in London to-day, I assure you, Lady Tregellis, it will take all your time to investigate them—to say nothing of imperilling your soul's salvation. Beware of the Diabolists.'

'Oh, I hope the Servers are not Diabolists,' put in Lady Rosalys. 'I shouldn't like to think that Angela Winterbourne had a familiar. She is very fond of cats. I now distrust the black Persian.'

'The Servers are no more than a Western offshoot of the Mohammedan Sufis,' pronounced Mr. Cleeve with authority. 'Lawrence Oliphant, a true Eastern occultist, held most of their opinions; and so did Richard Burton, who was a Mohammedan and a mystic to the core.'

'I knew them both intimately,' said Lady Tregellis, 'and neither of them ever talked to me about—what do you call them?—the Sufis. I shall ask Augustus Charafta to unravel the mystery.'

'Now, what I really do wish you'd unravel for me, Lady Tregellis,' said Cleeve, 'is the mystery of Sarel's influence. I have come in contact lately with a little school of fanatics, half political, half social, who hail him as a sort of Lassalle or Mazzini. That's why I want to meet the man, that I may see for myself what he's made of.'

'Iron,' put in the Guardsman. 'Sarel is a harder nut to crack than the Servers.'

'Well, I've told you,' said Lady Tregellis, 'that he'll have nothing to do with an ugly old woman. You might see if you can bait your hook with a young and pretty one. Try the South Sea Island beauty. I hear she is going to be the next London sensation.'

'Eustace Olver was talking to me about her in the Park this morning,' put in Sir Oscar. 'He says she is stunning. She was on the Terrace of the House of Commons yesterday. He said nobody cared a rush about the Government beating. All the M.P.'s were rushing to look at her.'

‘I’m told that she is a dream of beauty,’ said Lady Tregellis, ‘that she is as ignorant as a Hottentot, and that she is the only child of a triple millionaire, who calls himself ‘Orace H’Aldenning. Is all that true?’

‘Can’t say. But Eustace Olver dined with them at the House,’ replied Sir Oscar. ‘They were the guests of Pat O’Leary, the Irish Progressivist, you know. I asked Olver how he enjoyed his dinner. “Immensely, my dear fellow,” he said. “I fared sumptuously on barbaric charms and dropped *h’s*.”’

‘The Progressivists are strong on education, aren’t they?’ remarked another man, strolling up with an empty teacup. ‘It seems to me they’d better, before they begin destroying the House of Lords, start an educational standard for millionaires, and confiscate the property of all who don’t pass it. There’d be something practical in that.’

‘Dear Lady Tregellis,’ said Mr. Cleeve, returning to his charge, ‘I don’t think that the South Sea Island beauty or her papa are at all in my line. But couldn’t *you* manage to get hold of her, and try the bait on Sarel?’

‘Yes, I could,’ replied Lady Tregellis promptly; ‘but it don’t follow that Sarel would bite. I fancy, though, that Dorothea Queste might manage that introduction. She knows everybody. It is as likely as not that she knows Gavan Sarel.’

The old lady looked round, but Dorothea had gone off with the man who was carrying the empty teacup, and was at the other end of the studio chattering to him frivolously about a high-class ladies’ journal he had started, in which the contributors were to be recruited, as far as possible, from aristocratic society. It will be noticed that Mrs. Queste was exclusive in her circle of acquaintance, and that even the literary and artistic people who frequented her studio were in close touch with the great world, and not denizens

of Bohemia proper. No one except Charafta had observed how quickly and noiselessly she had glided away from the political group when Mr. Cleeve pressed his desire for an introduction to Gavan Sarel. Charafta sat still, like a benevolent spider in his corner, screened by a palm, with a portfolio in front of him; but he was now talking to Mrs. Winterbourne, who, with the glow of some other-world interest upon her faded face, looked more than ever like a tired angel. But while he talked, Charafta was listening, with a smile in his eyes, to the banalities Dorothea was uttering.

'Half a crown a week for a fashion paper! How *can* you expect a pauper artist to run to that? Why, I should have nothing left to buy gowns with. I should be obliged to stick together the five large coloured plates that you talk so much about and make a dress out of them. No, Mr. Elwyn, get Mrs. Olver to advertise your fashions; she'll do them justice.'

The editor entreated, pleading the interests of art, and suggesting a business footing for her co-operation.

'Oh, well,' said Dorothea, 'I'm sure that my son—Ral, you know—will be delighted when he comes back—I expect him every day—to make what he would call a decorative scheme in costumes for you. He does that sort of thing very well. And, if you like, I'll lend distinction to your enterprise by drawing a lovely lady in Greek draperies, with a large waist, who will illustrate old style as against new. But for practical purposes I advise you to enlist Mrs. Olver's sympathies, and let me go on clothing myself after my own inspirations. I'm no good as a Paris model.'

Angela Winterbourne listened in wonder. How could anyone capable of imagining those wonderful mystic pictures talk such stupid nonsense about gowns and Paris fashions, which in Mrs. Winterbourne's world were things of absolutely no importance?

'Oh, you mustn't judge her by that,' said Charafta,

answering the unspoken thought. 'Her chatter is like those black and white spotted veils which women fancy prevent people from noticing that they've been crying. I'm not talking about you, dear lady. If you wanted to cry, you'd cry, and the cause would be so very noble or so utterly impersonal that you wouldn't mind all the world knowing it.'

'I feel inclined to cry now,' said Angela. 'I seem to do so little good. It must be because I can't—try as I may—be interested in the things which seem to interest other people. If I could only attack women on the worldly side! I feel that about Rosalys Thane, who is so clever, and so dissatisfied with the hollowness of society, and so emancipated and ready to be influenced, if only someone—Father Forde, for instance, or you or I—could appeal to her in any light but as amiable cranks. I feel that, too, with Mrs. Queste.'

'You won't do any good with Mrs. Queste by attacking her on her worldly side,' said Charafta.

'I suppose not; and she won't show me the other.'

'Wait,' said Charafta; 'don't be disheartened. The time will come, later perhaps, when you or I may be of use to her.'

'Do you really think so?' Mrs. Winterbourne's sweet face kindled with pleasure. 'Oh, one does feel so dreadfully sorry for people who are living, and may die, in ignorance of all that priceless knowledge which we have had given to us—people who are on the very verge of the Unseen, and don't know it.'

Lady Tregellis had dismissed Gavan Sarel from her mind when next she accosted Dorothea.

'You won't forget,' she said, 'that I am lunching with you on Sunday. I am going to the Servites. A little good music will be a pleasing variety after what I've been enduring lately in search of salvation.'

'Have you found it, Lady Tregellis?' asked Charafta gravely, rising and approaching her.

'So it's you, Mr. Charafta, at last! Why didn't you come and speak to me before? Now, you are the person who should be able to tell me all about salvation; you've been far enough to look for it. I want to know if it is true that you have come straight from a Cyprian monastery, where you took vows of celibacy and signed a pledge against wine and meat?'

'At my age, dear lady, the monk is already made, and vows are unnecessary. Let me tell you, too, that I had a mutton chop for my luncheon and a pint of moselle; and I did not find any rest for my soul in Tehuantepec, where I've now come from, though a Mexican *machete* was nearly providing it for my body. So you have been going in for religious excitement. Where has it taken you?'

Lady Tregellis counted on her fingers.

'To the Theistic Church, which is nice and handy; also the Steinway Hall for Swedenborgianism on Wednesdays; then a terrible place near the Monument, where a learned Greek man—he'd suit Mr. Everard Cleeve—told us that our Madonnas and saints and altar decorations generally were a debasing form of art and worship, and that we'd better buy a Greek goddess from a museum and set her up and say our prayers to her. He might have seen for himself that Bacchus doesn't want votaries in England, and that a good many of our London women burn incense to Venus. Then I journeyed to hear a very remarkable Dane on the mysticism of the Cross. He looked like a resuscitated mummy, and was entirely incomprehensible, and most upsetting to all one's old ideas—so upsetting, that I'm taking the Servites as a counteracting influence. And there we are!'

'And there we are!' solemnly repeated Mr. Charafta. 'It's a long way to have gone.'

'I forget,' said Lady Tregellis, 'to put in Christian

Science. That was comforting. It was a woman who preached, a dear, fat, happy creature, who told us that nobody ought ever to be ill. She said that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and that illness is discord, and that there's no discord in the kingdom of heaven. It was all very nice, but somehow the arguments didn't seem to join together properly. Are you a Christian Scientist, Dorothea? I met the woman afterwards at the Olvers', and she mentioned you. And by the way, my dear'—Lady Tregellis lowered her voice, but not so much as to prevent people hearing her—'I've a word of warning to give you. Don't you confide in Mrs. Olver; she's a Jezebel, and is at the bottom of all the scandalous paragraphs in the *Torch*.'

'I never confide in anybody,' replied Dorothea, 'except Ral. Well, I do see that Mrs. Olver has points of resemblance with Jezebel. But, do you know, I've always considered Jezebel to be rather a maligned person. She only painted her face and tired her head, and if you were to throw down from their windows all the women in London who did that, one wouldn't be able to walk along the pavements.'

'Ah, you and I can laugh safely, Thea,' said Miss Tolvean, 'and so can auntie, for I haven't taken yet to make-up, and you are one of those Ninon de l'Enclos women who don't need it. As for Aunt Tregellis, she is only happy when complimented upon looking a Methuselah. But tell me—for I've been thinking seriously—Angela started Rosalys and me on thinking, and Father Forde has been talking to us. Do you believe in faith-healing?'

'I tried to,' answered Dorothea, 'but a tinned lobster eaten inadvertently shook my faith. It seemed ignominious that the harmony of the kingdom of heaven should depend on a potted crustacean.'

'You clever creature, you do put things so quaintly!'

cried Miss Tolvean. 'Oh, I wanted to know, am I really to come for my sitting to-morrow?'

'Certainly,' said Dorothea; and the two women kissed.

'Dorothea,' said Lady Tregellis, as she, too, was taking leave, 'while I think of it, ask that secretary person of yours on Sunday. Now, what is his beautiful name?'

'Do you mean Sebastian Blythe?'

'Yes; that name should be worth a fortune to him.'

'He hasn't got much in the way of fortune except his name,' said Dorothea. 'Poor Sebastian!'

'But he's a gentleman, isn't he? which most of them are not.'

'He is one of the Blythes of Bravenden.'

'Poor things! I know them; they've lost everything, Well, I want this man to help me put my *Reminiscences* into shape. How am I to find him?'

'Oh, that's quite easy,' said Dorothea; 'the thing is to lose him when he is found.'

'I call that ungrateful of you,' exclaimed Lady Rosalys, who had also come up to make her farewells; 'the poor creature adores you. It's quite lovely to hear him talk about his hopeless passion.'

'I'm not ungrateful,' said Dorothea seriously. 'I'm paying a tribute to constancy.'

'Well, I'm told he is just the person for my book,' said Lady Tregellis, 'and if you'll have him here on Sunday, Dorothea, that will be very sweet of you, and will get over the question of my finding him. Good-bye, dear. Evidently there's no chance of our seeing Ravage.'

Gradually the little crowd melted. Mrs. Winterbourne had torn herself from the seduction of Charafta's talk, and had said good-bye in her sweet, awkward manner.

'I wish you'd come oftener to see me,' she said shyly to Dorothea. 'We never have a chance of talking about real things. Mr. Charafta comes sometimes,' she added;

‘and I am sure’—she began, and looked pleadingly at Charafta, who encouraged her with a benevolent nod to proceed—‘Mr. Charafta agrees with me that you have leanings towards Us.’ She brought out the last word as though it were spelled with a capital and had no special personal application.

‘Us!’ repeated Dorothea, with a whimsical shake of her head. ‘Does “Us” mean the Servers?’

Mrs. Winterbourne blushed in a frightened, half-awed way.

‘Oh, we never talk about the Servers!’ she said.

‘Then I won’t. I’m too busy a woman to have any leanings except towards my work.’

‘Oh! but your work—it shows—it’s so occult.’

‘Is that what you call it? I notice that’s the catch-word now. Everything is “occult.” But I’m not in the very least occult, as Mr. Charafta will tell you. And I hate palmists, and spiritualists, and people who prophesy out of teacups. And my soul doesn’t rise very far above the sordid necessity of earning my living.’

Mrs. Winterbourne looked disappointed. She gathered up some of her stray properties; she was one of those women who always seem to be falling to pieces, and went away.

Soon, only Mr. Charafta was left. It was quite dark outside. Dorothea had turned on the electric light, and now she went to the window, pausing a moment before she pulled down the puckered yellow blind. Big Ben’s deep, melodious note was faintly audible.

‘Six o’clock!’ she said, with a sigh of relief. ‘No one will come now. It was good of you to let yourself be bored for so long. Do sit near the fire and talk.’

* * * * *

Dorothea placed herself in a deep chair by the side of the hearth. She leaned back wearily, silent for several minutes. It was almost as though in this sudden fit of

abstraction she had forgotten the presence of her visitor. Charafta interpreted her silence and her unguarded attitude as a sign of friendly confidence, and waited. Meanwhile he watched his hostess, admiring her charming face, out of which looked the deep brown eyes turned away from him to the fire, and seeming in the intensity of her preoccupation to gather yellow light from the flames. They were peculiar eyes, seldom opening to their full size unless she were in deep thought, or stirred out of her habitual self-control by some strong emotion. As a rule, they had a narrowed, blinking look, which, oddly enough, gave them a decided fascination. The lashes were unusually thick and curved, and the brows above were drawn as evenly as though traced in dark sepia. Her hair was sepia-coloured, too, with yellow shading, and waved off her forehead in a sort of classic sweep, showing no fringe, but only a few soft rings straying over the blue veins of her temples. The shape of her head, and the way it was set upon her long neck, gave her an air of great distinction. There was not a gray thread in her hair, and scarcely a line on her face, her skin being of that velvety sort, almost sallow by day, yet with a kind of luminous clearness, which lighted to brilliancy at night. No one could possibly have imagined that Dorothea Queste was the mother of a son of three-and-twenty, and that, allowing for the earliest of marriages, she must have crossed into the forties. She was one of those women who remain perennially young.

For the rest, her features were regular, and when she was tired or sad, delicate to sharpness. The face was oval, the lips rather thin, but extremely sensitive. At first sight, most people thought her merely distinguished, refined, and clever-looking. After five minutes in her company they discovered that she was very nearly beautiful. After half an hour, if she was in a sympathetic

mood, a great many were convinced that she was the most captivating woman they had ever known. Presently Dorothea awoke from her dream, and extended her hand in a charming gesture of apology.

‘Forgive me. You see, I don’t stand on ceremony with you. The truth is, I have had hardly a moment to myself to-day, and just before you arrived I got a letter which has—given me pause.’

Charafta made a sign of comprehension.

‘I hope that the letter did not contain disagreeable news.’

Dorothea bent forward, her chin on her hand, her eyes wide, and seeming still to reflect the flame from the hearth. She said, as if on an irrestrainable impulse:

‘It was the order of my release.’

‘I understand.’

The two looked at each other. Dorothea laughed a little nervously.

‘I don’t know why I said that. What curious eyes you have, Mr. Charafta! They seem to look such a long way into one. They must have drawn it out of me.’ Then she changed the subject. ‘Tell me what you thought of those sketches. They are rough designs for the illustrations to Lord Ravage’s new book. There is to be an *édition de luxe* with dry-points, but I haven’t yet started on the copper. How do they strike you?’

‘As showing what I told you is your great quality—inspiration,’ he replied. ‘But they have more than inspiration. I am surprised at your knowledge of small detail belonging to the period. You must have read up amazingly. I am all the more struck by this because of the fact you mentioned just now, that you had never been in Rome. And I remember your having told me that you don’t know Latin well enough to read the old writers in the original. How have you managed it?’

‘Ah, that is my secret. The detail is correct, then?’

'I'm pretty sure that, if you submitted your drawings to an expert like Lanciani, he would tell you they are perfectly correct.'

'Oh, they will be submitted to an expert. I like to verify my scenes as far as is possible. But when they come as vividly before me as these came, I don't feel much doubt of their being right. I'm glad you think they are correct. Perhaps it's because I have always had a sympathy with Agrippina.'

'Agrippina, the Empress, is the subject of Lord Ravage's new book!'

He spoke rather assertively than with interrogation.

'Yes. So you know that. I thought I was going to let you into a literary secret which won't be public property for some months yet. The famous long-lost Confessions of Agrippina will then appear "done into English by the Right Honourable Viscount Ravage, and illustrated by Dorothea Queste."'

'The dead Empress should be satisfied if she is now capable of interest in her self-appointed literary executor. Ravage's translation of Catullus was admirable.'

'Oh . . . I suppose so,' said Dorothea absently.

'So, as he made the poet of old Verona his solace in his first political retirement, Agrippina has enlivened Lord Ravage's second retreat,' Charafta went on. 'Well, he could not have chosen better. Agrippina must have been a most interesting woman. But you! I advise you, dear artist, to be less candid with your critics than you have been with me. They would say that to illustrate Imperial Rome without ever having been in modern Rome is an unparalleled audacity.'

'I know that. I will follow your counsel. Of course I could have gone to Rome if I had chosen, but Ravage and I talked the question over, and he agreed with me that—as I feared—modern Rome would only blur my picture.'

‘Lord Ravage is aware, then, of your reliance upon this other sense?’

‘We could hardly have worked together otherwise. He does not understand it, but he accepts it as what he calls a form of artistic clairvoyance. I have not spoken of that other sense to any living soul besides, except yourself.’

‘Not even to Gavan Sarel?’

Dorothea’s eyes turned on him again that startled, half-alarmed look, which seemed to say, ‘What do you know? How much do you suspect?’ But Charafta’s eyes were impenetrable. For a few moments she did not speak, then answered as though there had been nothing unusual in his question.

‘If you know Mr. Sarel, you must be fully aware that he scoffs at mysticism, and has no sympathy with any form of imaginative art. You would know, too, that he never reads anything but science and political economy and blue-books, and that at Oxford he was entirely undistinguished except as an athlete. Oh no, Mr. Sarel believes in nothing beyond the physical.’

‘He believes in his star.’

‘Yes,’ replied Dorothea, ‘he believes in his star, and he will follow it to victory.’

‘Or to defeat,’ put in Charafta.

‘He is too strong for defeat.’

‘The strongest man has often one weakness,’ said Charafta.

‘And that one weakness?’

‘May be a woman.’

There was another silence, which was broken by Dorothea.

‘Mr. Charafta, I want to speak to you about something you said to-day.’

She hesitated.

‘Pray go on.’

‘I want to tell you that, though in outward semblance

I may be an untrue person, in my inward parts I abhor falsity.'

'I believe that fully.'

'Well, I like to speak straight out to anybody I respect. I have a very strong impulse to speak frankly to you. Am I wise in trusting it?'

'Believe me,' he said, 'if you would always follow such impulses, you would not go far wrong.'

'I don't know. My impulses are anything but trustworthy guides, as I have had occasion to prove. But—you are a gentleman.'

'So Lady Tregellis remarked of Mr. Sebastian Blythe,' observed Charafta dryly.

Dorothea laughed.

'You know what I mean, and I know what you mean. Though Sebastian is, technically speaking, a gentleman, it would not be at all wise to confide in him. I don't mean in the least that you are technically a gentleman'—she foundered: 'that would imply something very odd in its application to you. I mean that I should be perfectly safe in your hands, even if you disliked and disapproved of me very much indeed.'

'Some women,' he said, 'who hated me have done me the honour of giving me their confidence. Truly I may say that not one of those have I ever betrayed.'

'Oh, I felt certain of that the first time we ever met, without both of us having on our social masks. You know what I mean? Everybody has to wear a social mask. We had often met before in London drawing-rooms, and I had been drawn to you then; but we were just playing our parts as man and woman of the world, and pretended nothing else. At the meeting I refer to a new light seemed to me thrown upon your character.'

'Perhaps I might say the same of you.'

‘Perhaps. Do you remember the time?’

‘Yes, we met in poor Grace Shelton’s room.’

‘And what futile efforts we both made to save the poor thing’s soul, and to rescue her body from what would seem the inevitable fate of such girls—girls uneducated, vain, shallow, and, alas! pretty.’

‘No effort to save a soul is futile,’ said Charafta.

‘But you know how she ended?’

‘Yes, she went from bad to worse, and is dead. You were very good to her. To the last you held before her an example of noble womanhood.’

‘Oh, don’t say that!’ cried Dorothea, shrinking as though he had jarred a nerve. ‘I detest that pharisaical attitude! In her position, no doubt, I should have been as bad, or worse.’

‘No doubt when you passed through the same human stage, and in an even more corrupt civilization, you *were* worse. The moral sentiment has evolved a little more quickly in you, that’s all. And your effort on her behalf will help her by-and-by to realize the ideal you set before her in yourself.’

‘But it is too late. She is dead.’

‘So was I, so were you, before we came to life again as Augustus Charafta and Dorothea Queste.’

‘Oh, are you going to preach me the doctrine of a series of existences?’

‘Why not?’

‘There’s no confirmation of it in Nature.’

‘Why not?’ he repeated. ‘Does not each one of us die every night as far as suspension of physical consciousness goes, awakening every morning to a new life? Why shouldn’t the immortal self have its day, too, and its night—its many days and many nights, making up one continuous life with dreaming intervals of hours—of centuries?’

'Only because I can remember past the dreaming hours to my yesterday's experiences, but I can't remember past the dream-centuries to my previous existence.'

'Are you so certain of that? What about the idiosyncrasies you cannot trace, and which make you what you are, and what no other human being is; the affinities with certain people only, when you might as well and as easily have been affined with any other persons in your world; the sense of echoes from a far past faintly vibrating, which any one of us, developed beyond the common herd, must have experienced? There are some few who do remember consciously to the back of the centuries, and there are many who remember unconsciously. What about that swollen, rushing river you were telling me of, and the splendour of that bygone city? What are the scenes you have drawn so unerringly? What but reflections in your memory—echoes from that far-off past!'

'It may be so,' said Dorothea. 'I don't contradict your theory, for it chimes with my own feelings. But I am an artist, and artists have vivid imaginations, curious faculties, not to be soberly relied upon.'

'Faculties which place them foremost in the slow march of evolution,' he replied. 'That is incontestable. It is the poet, not the scientist, who comes closest to Nature's secrets. Then think of the benevolence of a scheme,' he went on, 'which allows the orthodox beef-eating Churchman a foundation of fact for his unquestioning belief in the dogmas he hears thundered from the pulpit, and which to his reason are wholly unprovable, while it grants to the artist genius. Genius is but a quickening of the interior senses, and leads by a shorter cut to the same end as the dogmas are intended to serve—faith in the Omnipotent. It is only through the interior senses that we can grasp spiritual truth, and these are grown after the physical ones. Evolution is the word of the enigma.'

‘Evolution?’ said Dorothea. ‘A spiritual Darwinism?’

‘You may call it so. . . . Let me, too, quote Nature,’ he continued. ‘She is always ready to give the symbols of hidden truth if we choose to ask her for them. The tree puts forth new leaves every succeeding spring, each crop nourished in turn by the sap from the parent stem. The trunk increases in girth and height. Through buddings and blossomings and ever-recurring leafage the tree-consciousness evolves to its limit. The vegetable consciousness seeks a new type, and merges in the animal; the animal, by gradations, into the human. Never hasting, never resting, evolution goes on. In man’s soul the mind spark is lighted. It grows into flame, and evolution steps more quickly. The flame burns, soul and intellect develop through many human forms and many degrees of matter, till at last, the carnal husk cast, soul reaches the pure spirit, which is all-consciousness and memory gathered back to its fount.’

Charafta paused. His voice had taken a swaying cadence quite unlike that of his ordinary conversation: it was the voice of the mystic.

‘Tell me more,’ said Dorothea.

‘Well, in the doctrine of reincarnation, which is as old as civilization, you have the explanation of the human problem—the only one in which there is dignity and completeness. Every other makes each individual life a shred, a meaningless tatter, a ghastly riddle with no possible solution. And why bar progress at the human? Science admits unity in the physical world, where we may trace life, evolving from the germ, upwards through all its varieties and complexities, till in man it unites with mind. But at this stage science shuts the door. It has nothing to tell of the evolution of the soul—that glorious development of transcendent faculties of which physical evolution is but the shadow thrown to earth. . . . And the germ of

that evolving soul, the central Vitality, through which alone there can be union with the Creator! Like the life embedded in the grain of mustard-seed, it must be sought within, and can only be found when the spiritual self, withdrawn from the gates of the senses, lies entrenched in its inmost sanctuary.'

Again there was a sonorous rhythm in Charafta's language and tone, giving the suggestion of some remote chant, and as though the real man were far away. The effect of his voice and of the expression of his face reacted upon Dorothea. She, too, seemed carried far away; and again she had that inexplicable yearning she so often felt for something glad and grand and free—for the inspiration of the woods, for the solemn glory of sculptured marbles, and for music strange and wild and ecstatic—some swelling pæan, she imagined, sung in a dead tongue, which nevertheless had once been living to her ears.

'These thoughts are not new to me,' she said. 'They are like echoes of teaching I have heard before. Who taught you to think them?'

'Asphalion,' answered the old man, with the reverence of one pronouncing a sacred name; and as he said the word he watched her face intently.

She gave a slight start, and put her hand to her brow as though to evoke some dim recollection.

'Asphalion!' she repeated.

'You have heard that name?' said Charafta.

'I cannot tell.' Dorothea spoke in subdued accents, searching still for a clue. 'It seems familiar, yet surely no one has ever spoken it to me before. Did it come to me in a dream? . . . Asphalion . . . I don't remember.'

'Perhaps,' said Charafta, 'you will remember by-and-by. We will not speak now of Asphalion. Tell me—for you said you wished to talk to me frankly—what are those things, those experiences, which puzzle you, and which you

thought I might perhaps be able to explain. Is it that vague recollection which you meant?

‘No, it is not altogether that which I meant . . . a little, perhaps.’ . . . She again hesitated. ‘Don’t think I am going to make any extraordinary revelation of myself, though I cannot help feeling you would be interested in anything I might tell you. It is difficult to imagine why. I cannot help also fancying that perhaps you know more about me than I should wish you to know. And again I have no idea how you could have gained any information. But—— I seem to be talking incoherently. Will you tell me truthfully—are you my friend?’

‘Indeed, you have no friend in London—not even excepting Lord Ravage—more loyally devoted to you than I.’

There was a thrill of emotion in the old man’s voice. Dorothea put out her hand and clasped his.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘I believe what you say.’

‘The best proof I could have given you of my devotion,’ said Charafta, ‘is in having spoken to you of Asphalion.’

‘Is that indeed so? Then, the name means a great deal to you?’

‘I will tell you some day what it means—not yet.’

‘I am not worthy of your friendship,’ said Dorothea. ‘And you will find out my unworthiness, and you will forsake me.’

Charafta smiled as might an indulgent father upon an impulsive child, but he said nothing.

‘At least,’ she said, ‘tell me why you care for me.’

‘For no reason which any other man of your acquaintance could give. I am not, and never could be, in love with you, even supposing my age were such that the mere notion would not, as now, be ridiculous.’

Dorothea gave an expressive little twist of her neck—a gesture of hers.

'You are not so cynical as to imply that all my men friends are, or have been, in love with me?'

'Not all, perhaps; but a considerable proportion of them. Putting that detail aside, however, I may tell you that my interest is rather in the mystic side of your nature than in the mundane. I wish you would let me hear how that other sense of yours began to manifest itself.'

'To do that,' said Dorothea, 'I should have to go back to my girlhood—my very early girlhood—some time before I married.'

'Yet you could have been little more than a child when you married.'

'I am much older than I look,' she replied. 'I shall be forty-two my next birthday. You know,' she went on—'no, I suppose you don't know—that I had a most lonely and unhappy childhood. My mother died when I was two years old, and the aunt who brought me up, and my father, too, were very intolerant of what they supposed to be my hysterical fancies. They used to think I was telling lies, and would punish me with whippings and dry bread and water when I said anything about the odd things I saw; so, naturally, I got into the habit of keeping my visions to myself—a habit which has lasted all my life.'

'And those things that you saw—what were they?'

'Oh, people I did not know—somebody, perhaps, standing beside some real person; somebody who was not in the room at all. Or pictures of places that weren't there, and of the wild people—old-time Irish—we lived in Ireland, not far from Ravage's place, though he didn't know anything about me then—pictures of scenes that must have happened ever so long back. There would be the real landscape, the hills and shores as I knew them, only with strange buildings on them, and figures I did not know. I was never frightened, probably because then I hardly

ever saw anything disagreeable. It was really extremely interesting, and consoled me for a great deal of unhappiness.'

'And you were given bread and water to cure you of your visions? Poor child!'

'When I was about fifteen,' Dorothea went on, 'I became filled with the most solemn sense of religion; I thought of hardly anything else. If I had been a Roman Catholic I should certainly have wished to be a nun, and I used to think that if I had lived in ancient times I should have been a Vestal. I was often very wretched; then I liked to read the Bible, and afterwards I would spend hours in a kind of ecstasy. . . . Oh, I recollect it so well! I can shut my eyes now and see the place where I used to get those fits of exaltation. It was an old wood on the edge of a cliff—a wood of Scotch firs, with the sea showing below through the red trunks of the trees. I can feel the fine short grass on which I used to lie, and the wind on my face; I can almost recall in fancy, but never now in reality, the ecstatic sensation I would get, as though I had been caught up to the third heaven. It was on Sunday often, after I had been naughty in the weekdays, that I would take my Bible and go away alone to my wood; and the good fit then would last till about Thursday, and then I would get naughty and miserable again.' Dorothea caught her breath in a quavering sigh, as though she were actually going through the early wretchedness she described. 'I have always thought that sort of childhood ought to make one very tender and sympathetic to one's own child,' she said. 'But Ral—my boy—was never like me. He never had fancies and ecstasies and visions; he has never had an ideal, even, unless it's myself. Yes, I do believe that I am Ral's ideal; he likes to think of me as clever and the fashion; and the more famous I became the more he would think of me. It's only because I'm the fashion that Ral

tolerates my want of technique, and what he calls my artistic sentimentalism.'

Charafta seemed to discern in her simple revelation the makings of a tragedy. He uttered a sympathetic exclamation.

'Nevertheless,' she said, 'I think that Ral's feeling about me comes nearer than anything else to his conception of an ideal, and will continue so till he falls in love. Well, it is something to fill the place of an ideal to your son, even though the pedestal on which he stands you is not an over-solid one. And I doubt if Ral will marry for love; he is so practical that he is more likely to marry for money.'

Charafta's foreboding grew more definite. Something in his look made Dorothea say, with that cynical little twist of her head:

'To hear me talk of him, Mr. Charafta, you'd hardly suppose that my son Alaric has been the chief object of my existence.'

'I don't doubt it,' he answered.

'And though his ideal has not been a very grand one, I have lived in dread lest I might destroy it. For myself,' she added impetuously, 'thank Heaven, my ideal has never been a human one, and so I have not had the painful shock of discovering that my god had clay legs. High above me I saw Him in that wood of red firs; distant He was then, and distant He has always remained.'

'You became conscious of a Presence—of what, for want of a better term, one might call a guardian angel—there in the wood during those hours of religious ecstasy?' he asked.

'Yes, it was then that I had the consciousness which still in my dreams, but never in my waking moments, comes to me at rare times—of a godlike Being watching over me, and trying to make me understand that my wretchedness

arose greatly from faults in my own nature, which I might overcome if I would. I persuaded myself that this Being was Christ. All my ideas of Christ were modelled on my remembrance of that face. I have always disliked the conventional "Ecce Homos!" and pictures of the Saviour, even the Leonardo da Vinci one, that I have ever seen. My face was so infinitely grander, and more glorious and beautiful.'

'And that face,' asked Charafta, moving forward, and evidently deeply interested—'can you remember it now?'

'Only vaguely, as one might remember the face of a beloved parent who had died in one's childhood. I lost communion with that Being, Mr. Charafta, when I ceased to be the pure visionary child, and when all the Vestal feeling had left me—when—I'll tell you the truth—when I married my husband without loving him, and became soiled and corrupted.'

There was passionate regret in Dorothea's tone. She gave a wild look up from the fire into the old man's eyes.

'It is true—it is true, and sometimes I think that I would give everything I care most for on earth to have that communion back again.'

'The face,' persisted Charafta—'you say it still haunts you in dreams? You can't recall it? You can't remember any distinguishing feature or characteristic trait which would make it real for you again? You have no definite impression lingering in your waking mind?'

'It is a consciousness rather than an impression—a sense of extraordinary grandeur and purity, and of tenderness indescribable. I wonder why they represent Charity always as a woman? for that Being is Charity embodied—or perhaps I should say ensouled.' She spoke in awed accents. 'And—yes—sometimes, at the very moment of awakening, there are flashes which fade almost instantly

into mistiness—flashes bringing back a smile of divine sweetness, such a smile as Christ might have given to Mary of Bethany—flashes which show the gleam of eyes looking out piercingly from under level brows, curiously straight brows—all-seeing eyes.'

'Ah,' murmured Charafta, 'and their colour?'

'Deep, deep blue, like the sea as it used to look sometimes through the red firs; like the sky on some windless days. Eyes that are unfathomable, and have a light and a glory which make one tremble.'

'A light piercing swiftly as the dart of a javelin, before which impurity must flee, yet compassionate as the eye of God to human frailty.'

'You know?' said Dorothea, her voice trembling as she half rose from her chair. 'You understand? You have seen?'

'I have seen Asphalion,' answered Charafta.

He had risen also from his seat, and stood opposite Dorothea by the oak fireplace. He was scarcely as tall as she, and she was not a large woman; but as he reared back his head that he might the better observe her, and raised his hand almost as though he were a priest about to bestow a blessing, she had a fancy that his whole form had caught some of the indescribable glory which seemed shed at the mere mention of that sacred name.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'It is growing late, and I ought not to detain you. Thank you for what you have told me. We will talk about all this again. In the meantime, remember that I am your friend.'

'But *you* have told me nothing!' she exclaimed, with an accent of reproach. 'And there's so much that you might tell. Who is Asphalion? What has he to do with the Being who once cared for me? Oh, if you know Asphalion, and he is what you seem to say, reveal him to me!'

‘I cannot do that,’ answered Charafta. ‘It is for the Master to reveal himself to the disciple whom he has chosen. But I have this message for you: When you have purified your life and paid your debt of suffering, then, it may be, will the Master show himself to you face to face.’

‘Have I not suffered enough?’ cried Dorothea. ‘My debt to Fate must be heavy indeed, if it remains still undischarged.’

‘I could tell you much,’ said Charafta, with his remote smile, ‘but not now. When opportunity served, and you were in the mood, I might expound to you the two great laws which, according to Asphalion’s teaching, govern the universe. There is the Law of Sacrifice, which lies at the root of the Mystery of Pain—— Do you know that ancient saying about Zeus? “*Zeus, who made for man the road to Thought, and established ‘Learn by Suffering’ to be an abiding law.*” . . . And there is the second law—the Law of Readjustment, by which human environment is determined, and the good and evil of each succeeding life balanced and readjusted to mark a stage in the progress of the soul. Then I might tell you of the Three Lords of Destiny, whom the Greeks roughly figured in their three Fates, and who are the Agents of the Law. So you would begin to understand dimly that, as a man soweth, thus shall he reap; and that under the Law of Readjustment, heavy dues are exacted from the Vestal who breaks her vows, and from the woman whose selfish passion has cut short a fellow-creature’s earthly existence.’

‘I don’t care about opportunity; I am ready to listen now,’ said Dorothea, most strangely impressed by Charafta’s rhythmical voice and mystic hints. ‘I ask nothing better than to profit by the teaching of which you speak.’

‘No, you are not ready yet,’ replied Charafta. ‘Evidently, in your case, some ordeal has to be passed through

first. That is how I interpret Asphalion's message. Its practical application I must leave to you to discover.'

So saying, he bowed over Dorothea's hand, and, abruptly changing his manner, uttered a few courteous words of commonplace as he took his departure. He left her standing before the fire, bewildered, as though the scene which had taken place were a vivid dream from which she had been suddenly awakened.

INTERLUDE.

For some minutes after Charafta had left her, Dorothea remained in reverie, unable to throw off the dream-like impression his words had produced. Had any other person spoken them, or had she that day been in her ordinary mood, she might have laughed at the whole thing as a charlatan's attempt to get at the secrets of her inner life. But the letter of which she had spoken to Charafta as the order for her release had carried her outside the circle of everyday existence, and had shaken her hold on mundane realities. New vistas opened confusedly before her, and there were possibilities in her future which went with the notion of a commanding Fate, working emotional complications to a harmonious issue. And then Charafta could have had no object in probing her secrets. He was no charlatan; of that she was convinced. He was essentially a gentleman in the more than technical sense—a gentleman of her own world, or, it would be truer to say, of a world into which she had fought her footing, rather than one to which she rightly belonged. He had never, to her knowledge, postured as a mystic or as a moral teacher, and though people talked about the peculiarity of his religious views, and there was, she believed, some foundation for Lady Tregellis' allusion to his monastic experiences, Charafta was the last person to make social capital out of anything of the sort. He had rather more than the English reserve, and, while parrying curiosity with the most perfect good-humour, did not give

any explanation of his frequent absences, or put forward his peculiar philosophy. He might have talked to his intimates, but they, like Mrs. Winterbourne, were as reticent as he himself. In general company he only laughed off inquiries on the subject of his beliefs.

Dorothea awoke at last, and said with a laugh to herself:

'Good gracious! Am I a hard-headed working woman of forty-two, or am I a hysterical girl of sixteen? I must have been hysterical in those days; that's always the explanation of such things. The saints and seers one reads about were mostly hysterical or epileptic. Well, am I earning my daily bread and a little cake to go with it, in the thick of London turmoil, or am I dreaming among the Scotch firs once more—dreaming myself back into that invisible world of which I lost the key so long ago? Asphalion, at any rate, it seems, holds the key, if there be an actual Asphalion. . . . Yes, I'm sure the old man was in earnest. Probably Asphalion is some great priest or philosopher whom he has met in his wanderings—in the Cyprus monastery, perhaps; or he may be some superhuman being. Why shouldn't there be superhuman beings living half in the world and half out of it? If one believes the Bible, Christ must have done so after His resurrection. That face I used to see was no invention of my own. The most hysterical imagination couldn't have conjured up anything so godlike. Oh to see it! to feel Him near me once again! to stand in that Presence! . . . If only my dream would not always end with the closed door. *He* is on the other side of the door, and He will not open unto me. . . . But then the ordeal Mr. Charafta spoke of—the purifying of my life. Was it clap-trap, or could he know, and did he mean——' Dorothea's thinkings found broken utterance rising scarcely above a whisper. 'It sounds like the tests prepared for pupils before they were initiated into the old mysteries. . . . And why shouldn't

there be mysteries, even in these days, hidden from the crowd? It is absurd to suppose that those wise men whose writings have lived these hundreds of years, and whose thought moulds the thought of this very age, should have believed in a lie. . . . Oh! is it possible that Mr. Charafta guesses? . . . Why did he say that about Gavan Sarel? . . .

The soft boom from Westminster again smote faintly upon Dorothea's ear. Seven o'clock! She remembered that at eight Lord Ravage, his sister, and Sebastian Blythe were coming to dine with her, a fact she had not thought it necessary to communicate to Lady Tregellis.

The practical housewife now took the stage and drove away the dreamer. Dorothea Queste, poverty-stricken artist and careless Bohemian, as she was wont laughingly to style herself, had nevertheless a great pride in the daintiness of her dinner-table and the nicety of her domestic arrangements. She entertained a good deal in her very simple fashion, and her entertainments were extraordinarily popular. She spared no pains to make them so, principally for Alaric's sake, she told herself. Alaric cared so much for that kind of thing—for getting on in the world, and being admired and popular in the right set. It was not without reason that Lady Tregellis had exclaimed at the excellence of Mrs. Queste's caviare sandwiches—the caviare had been a present from a great Russian banker, whose daughter she had painted—and that a certain French diplomatist praised Mrs. Queste's chocolate as the best he had tasted in London. Her soufflés were famous also, and some Italians she knew declared that she must have an Italian chef; while Anglo-Indians went into ecstasies over her curries, and were convinced that the chef must be a Kling. Dorothea frankly owned that she made the curries herself, and that she had learned the art from a Kling cook. And she would discourse upon that particular

branch of art to thrifty ladies, whose souls were in their kitchens, and who had children to be painted, quite in their own language, and with such grave enthusiasm over matters culinary that others standing by who knew her only as the artist, would wonder if she were making fun of her listeners.

'... And so economical ! A few scraps of chicken and cold vegetables, or even some stewed prunes from the children's luncheon, and a tomato or an apple, and sour milk. Oh no, you mustn't forget the sour milk—*everybody* can have sour milk in the house—and—ah well, for a curry, that's all.'

So Dorothea would vaguely wind up, catching the eye of someone more familiar with her in other parts.

She played so many parts, and was sincere in all. She could talk gowns as well as philosophy, the social chatter of a certain set, and the intellectual and art jargon of another — business alternately with sentiment. Stern necessity, she always said, had made her a clever house-keeper ; also she would say that, being an artist, she liked having things pretty about her ; and that, possessing very little money, she gave brains and time instead to the achieving of prettiness. No doubt the expenditure was returned fourfold in the shape of commissions, but she did not dwell on that view of the question. The prettiness was not of the tawdry kind ; she was too great an artist for that. Everything she had was good of its sort. There had been times when she had almost starved herself in order to buy a set of old Delft bowls, or a bit of tapestry, or a quaint piece of plate. In her little dinners she aimed at the perfection of simplicity. The dishes were few, but she had a young foreign cook, who had the makings of a great chef and did not know it, and who, besides, was too devoted to her to be tempted to leave her service. Dorothea employed mostly Swiss servants, whom she caught fresh in their native cantons and trained to her requirements. She went in for doing things in

foreign fashion, and it was amusing to see the raptures her *pot-au-feu* evoked, while her coffee had a flavour—so her fashionable friends said—which they found it quite impossible to obtain in their own homes. Then, she had always some curious and delicious liqueur, in some equally curious old Dutch bottle, about which she maintained a smiling mystery, refusing to tell anyone where she got it. Gradually the liqueur would become celebrated in London society, it was so often quoted. All these things helped to make her parties popular; the rest was due to her own individuality. To everything around her she gave the stamp of her peculiar charm. It amused her to plan little surprises in the way of decoration—surprises that cost nothing. Once, in honour of a royal lady, who had asked herself to dinner, Dorothea adorned her table with red and yellow and purple fungi, which she had gathered the day before in a wood where she was making a study of autumn foliage. The dinner—and especially the fungi, with their morbid hues and streaks and spots, set in moss and decaying leaves and queer things from the wood—was a great success. The Queen, a poetess, was charmed with the originality of the decorations, and remarked to Charafta, who was present, and was a friend of hers, that it suggested that touch of uncanniness in which lay a great deal of their hostess's fascination.

It will be seen that Dorothea was a fashion among certain people; and perhaps nowadays it was mere affectation in her to call herself a poor Bohemian, for she had plenty of orders, and received high prices for her portraits; while, besides this work, she made a speciality of a particular kind of illustration, in which she commanded the market. She worked extraordinarily hard; indeed, only such marvellous vitality as she possessed could have stood the strain of toil and pleasure. Socially speaking, however, her path was made easy. Her own sex liked her,

for though she could say sharp things, she did not do so at the expense of other women, unless it was universally conceded that they deserved it. She did not pretend to be younger than she was, which, in truth, would have been difficult, seeing that she had a son of twenty-three, and old for his years. She did not flirt, or take away other women's lovers; on the contrary, she showed a catholic sympathy with all affairs of the heart, even when they were based on not altogether legitimate lines. She was a real 'pal,' a good comrade to men and women alike. All the world knew that certain men were devoted to her, and that one in especial would probably marry her were he allowed the chance. But her husband was alive, though not in evidence; and her son was, as she had told Charafta, and as all her friends knew, the object of her life. Therefore the question of marriage could not arise, and as regards the question of anything but marriage, in that relation, it was taken for granted that she would never permit the limits of friendship to be overstepped.

At first society had not quite admitted this, and had been inclined to resent Lord Ravage's obvious attachment. As years went on, however, it was accepted as a matter of course, its very frankness disarming criticism. He was her cousin—only a distant cousin, certainly—and Irish cousins don't count for so much as Scotch ones; still, the relationship explained a great deal, and the fact that Mrs. de Burgh, Lord Ravage's sister, was a devoted friend of Dorothea explained all the rest. Mrs. de Burgh's countenance, like charity, would have covered a multitude of sins, had there in this instance been any to cover, and Lord Ravage's high character as a statesman and a man of chivalric honour forbade scandalous insinuations.

The British public was divided in its opinion of Lord Ravage, one half declaring that he was a greater poet than statesman, and that his true vocation was literature; the

other half, that his pursuit of literature and occasional retirements from the storm of political battle for the gentle wooing of his muse were a waste of valuable powers, and that he was shamefully neglecting his natural mission as pilot of the Imperial destinies. He had twice been Prime Minister. The first time he had gone out on a question of foreign policy; the second, on one of home reform, upon which he had appealed to the country, and had been defeated by a large majority. This was some years back, and had served as a pretext for again quitting the arena and becoming the man of letters. Now the political pendulum was swinging back, and it was held that if Ravage would conciliate the Progressivists, who held the balance of power in the House, he might come in at the head of affairs once more.

But the Progressivists were an incalculable quantity. They had started a little opposition cave under the leadership of Gavan Sarel, and were free-lances, whose mission, it seemed, was to fight or to support the powers which happened to be, according to opportunity given, for the development of certain daring reforms of their own conception not yet within the sphere of practical politics.

The little camp had become a large one, and had extended its operations from a political to, it might almost be said, a moral crusade. It had suited the Progressivist book to support the Tories, in view of some minor reforms in the alcoholic question. They were putting in the thin end of the wedge, said their enemies; it was the mask of the wolf who would shortly gobble up the lamb. Now it appeared that the lamb was about to meet its legendary fate. The wolf had dropped his covering. Gavan Sarel had led his party through the Opposition lobby, and the Government had been brought down to an unworkable majority.

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SCENES

Lord Ravage arrived at Mrs. Queste's house a quarter of an hour before his sister. He had come straight from Westminster, and was going back there later. He did not stand greatly on times and ceremonies with Dorothea, it being his frequent habit to drop in upon her about dusk, and to stay and share her evening meal.

She was in her usual corner by the fireplace when he entered, and did not rise to greet him, but held out her hand with a welcoming gesture and the smile that made her face seem quite girl-like.

He bent over her hand, raising it to his lips as a courtier might kiss the hand of his sovereign. There was in the man's appearance and mien something of an old-world knightliness which made the act seem natural and congruous. Like many of the West-Coast Irish, he bore the trace of Spanish ancestry, and, had he been dressed in velvet doublet and trunk hose, might very well have stepped out of the frame of a portrait by Velasquez. His black hair was grizzled and a little worn away at the temples, showing an intellectual expanse of forehead, but there was hardly a gray line in the short pointed beard and silky moustache. His eyes were dark and rather dreamy, but in moments of eloquence they could shoot fire from under his slightly overhanging brows. The mouth was sensitive, and the whole face inclined to melancholy. As is often the case in those of Celtic descent, it was a curious blend of weakness and strength, of the poet and the man of action.

'So Mary has not come yet?' he said. 'I saw four places laid as I passed the dining-room. Has Alaric arrived?'

‘No. I am uncertain when to expect him, but from his last letter I hardly think before to-morrow. The fourth place is for Mr. Blythe.’

‘Oh!’ Ravage’s face did not express entire satisfaction.

‘Mary made the arrangement this morning,’ explained Dorothea. ‘She wants someone to go with her to a lecture or a drawing-room meeting—something philanthropic, or it wouldn’t be like Mary to require a representative of the press—at the Watergate House in Chelsea. Sebastian Blythe was here, and offered his services, which were accepted.’

‘You are not going?’ he asked.

‘No; I’m afraid I’m not philanthropic—in the drawing-room-meeting sense, at any rate. I’m hoping instead for a quiet talk with you. They will leave us soon after dinner.’

He looked at her with affectionate solicitude.

‘I fancy that you are a little tired, my dear—worn and somewhat harassed. Have you had a hard day?’

‘No—I mean, yes. Two sitters this morning, and the last touches to some black-and-white work which had to be sent off. Then my people this afternoon—not a particularly large or oppressive crowd, though. After that, an odd talk with Augustus Charafta.’

‘Charafta! What had he to say?’

‘Very strange things. I am not quite sure whether I am in the world or not—a little doubtful whether I am really Dorothea Queste or a sort of survival from some Delphic temple or Academic grove.’

‘Ah! So he has been talking Pythagoreanism?’

‘Do you know that side of Augustus Charafta?’

‘No. But one evening—I think it was at Mrs. Winterbourne’s, when she made us stay after the rest had gone—we got somehow on to the Greeks, and I was led into

speaking of my emotions on first steaming into the Piræus, and of how strangely familiar the Acropolis seemed; I could almost have imagined that as a boy I had walked and studied on that historic ground. He seemed interested, and from the Parthenon our talk wandered to pagan and Christian symbolism, and he asked me if I had seen the statue of the Divine Shepherd by Kalamis; then to the tenets of Pythagoras, about which he seemed to know more than most people, though he could not give me the reason for that famous injunction against beans. I was much struck by this phase of the man, though, except on that one occasion, I have never known him show it.'

'Nor I—I mean that he never talked mysticism to me before to-day. Ravage,' she added, 'you know most things, and have read all kinds of out-of-the-way books. Have you ever come across the name of Asphalion?'

Lord Ravage reflected.

'Do you mean a little-known philosopher of the fourth century, who is supposed to have been a contemporary in Alexandria of Hypatia?'

'The fourth century! Well, he could hardly have been a personal friend of Mr. Charafta's,' she said, laughing.

'It sounds to me a name that might quite as well be modern Greek. What about Asphalion?'

'Nothing. You are sure there's nobody living of that name?'

'No one that I know of. Is it a case of clairvoyance again? Have you been seeing more pictures? If so, I hope they are as wonderful as the Agrippina series.'

'No; at least, I have made a sketch of the procession from the Temple of Jupiter down the Via Sacra, and I want you to verify it. That wasn't what I meant. But, see, here is Mary.'

A stately woman in black velvet, with a most sweet and sympathetic face, not unlike her brother, but much

younger, came in and kissed Dorothea, while she nodded to Ravage.

‘I’m not late, am I? Mr. Blythe got out of his hansom just behind me.’

Sebastian Blythe entered as she spoke. He was a rather distinguished-looking man of doubtful age, with aristocratic features and blue eyes, which never met straightly those of the person he was talking to—a peculiarity which had perhaps something to do with certain rumours as to his past that were always being brought up against him. These, however, when sifted did not amount to anything more definite than that he had once been in the Church, and was a clergyman no longer. His profession now seemed a much more complicated affair: journalist, art-critic, temporary secretary when a job offered—he never remained permanent secretary to anyone—travelling interviewer for the *Hemisphere*, and social organizer to helpless and would-be fashionable ladies, which last employment, it was said, he found more lucrative than any of the others. He filled all these parts. He came of an old family, one of the reasons why so many good houses received him, and if he lived by his wits, there was this excuse, that he had been educated in the days when trade was considered a form of crime among the aristocracy, and that there was nothing else for him to live upon.

Another reason for his popularity was that he was useful, was in the swim, knew everything that was going on, and would take infinite pains to obtain any information he did not already possess, or to perform any large or small commission that might be entrusted to him. He brought now the photograph of an altar-piece in some out-of-the-track Italian church, which Dorothea had expressed a wish to see, and he produced from his pocket some seeds of a plant Mrs. de Burgh had greatly wanted for her conservatory, but had failed to procure, and which

Sebastian Blythe had managed to get for her through a West Indian Governor. He had the air of a sleek, petted lapdog as, with hands outstretched, he came shiveringly up to the blazing hearth. There he stood, shedding around a sweet impersonal smile, in which, nevertheless, was a suggestion of mechanism.

'I don't think, Mr. Blythe, that I ever knew anyone quite so cold as you always seem to be,' remarked Dorothea.

'That's what Alaric says. He declares the only man he ever knew who is as cold as I am was a man on board our boat, who used to die every night.'

'Who used to die every night!' repeated Mrs. de Burgh.

'He had had his spine cut about,' explained Mr. Blythe in the deep, melodious voice which was one of his attractions. 'It was always when he went to sleep that the thing occurred. His heart would stop, and, in fact, literally he died. But there's an excuse for my being cold which none of the rest of you have got. You haven't come from tropic regions right into a London fog.'

'But that was two months ago,' said Dorothea. 'My son told me that he parted with you at Yokohama; 'you should have become acclimatized by this time.'

'Who ever gets acclimatized to England?' said he, and then went to the easel upon which Miss Tolvean's portrait was placed, and commented on the progress which had been made since his last inspection. Dinner was announced just then, and he paired off with Mrs. de Burgh, followed by Lord Ravage and Dorothea, who had motioned to him to proceed.

The dining-room with the studio above it made a wing built out at the side of the house, and had a separate staircase, leading into the hall near the entrance door.

They had just descended the stairs, when there was the sound of a cab outside, stopping sharply. Then came a ring, and before the summons could be answered there was the click of the lock as the door opened.

‘It is Alaric!’ cried Dorothea. ‘My dear boy, I didn’t expect you for days yet.’

‘Ah! you didn’t count upon my overlanding from Marseilles. I ought to have wired from Paris, but, somehow, I didn’t. Anyhow, you see I haven’t left my latch-key in Japan.’

The voice was like Dorothea’s own, rounded and musical, but it had a ring of mastery in it which hers had not.

‘Mother . . . this is good.’

A tall figure showed in the half-light of the hall. Dorothea, quitting Ravage’s arm, had run to it, and was pressed in her son’s embrace.

‘I’m afraid that I am abominably ill-timed,’ said Alaric, turning to Mrs. de Burgh and Lord Ravage with respectful courtesy. ‘I must beg you to forgive my bad manners, and to take no notice of me. How do you do, Blythe? Got back without any more scrimmages? Doda, I’m ashamed of upsetting you on your way in to dinner. I’ll go and get off some of my grime, and pick you up where I find you.’

‘Don’t dress, Ral,’ said Dorothea. ‘I am sure that Mrs. de Burgh will excuse you.’

‘All right—thanks,’ and he bowed assent to Mrs. de Burgh’s rather contradictory ‘Oh no; please don’t!’ ‘But I couldn’t put myself into evening dress,’ he said, ‘if I wanted to, until my little Jap comes along with the luggage.’ He ran up three steps and stopped, beckoning to the maid as he took a handful of silver out of his pocket, but added, ‘No, no! never mind,’ and ran down again; ‘I’ll see to my things myself.’

He was not very long in getting off his grime, and appeared before the fish had been taken away. Dorothea gazed at him proudly; she was undoubtedly very fond of her son. Yet in temperament they must have been totally unlike. One hardly needed her testimony that there was nothing of the idealist about Alaric. But for his good looks—and here he did resemble his mother, having the same colouring, the same regular features, only on a larger mould, and something of the same distinctiveness—he might have been set down in the first five minutes as a very ordinary young man. After a little while, however, it would become clear that there was something out of the common about Alaric Queste—something which impressed and attracted even those who did not like him, and of these Lord Ravage, in his gentle way, was one. Perhaps it was the young man's indomitable will which, unconsciously to themselves, influenced the people with whom he came into contact; perhaps it was his faculty for enthusiasms. He hid his earnestness under a curious levity of manner, but all the same it was there. His enthusiasm took many forms; that was the one fault to be urged against Alaric as a man bent on a career. He was too versatile. Yet whatever he did was done, while it lasted, with his whole heart. Usually it was an enthusiasm about some new form of art-technique, or another interpretation of the old masters' methods. In the last five years he had journeyed through many phases, by way of Impressionism from the Pre-Raphaelites, to the Realistic school, and now to the Early Dutch. No, now there would be a fresh development, for the East must undoubtedly have laid upon him her mark. But his enthusiasm would branch out as well in more secular directions, sometimes as a scheme of decoration, of travelling, or even of pleasure—occasionally of money-making. Dorothea used to tell him that what he needed to make him a true artist was

soul, and that he must discover the hidden meanings of things before he could truly illustrate Nature. Alaric, on his side, would argue that the artist's business was simply to paint what he saw, and not to worry himself over hidden meanings. Then Dorothea would tell him that as soon as he fell desperately in love he would find his soul, and Alaric would laugh and assure her that she on her part must first discover for him her own prototype before that event could come to pass. So far, the prototype had not been discovered. Alaric was admiringly in love with his mother, but had loved no one besides. Certainly, he was still young.

As Alaric seated himself at the dinner-table, he gave his mother a long look of approval which Mrs. de Burgh thought touching and pretty, but which Lord Ravage resented unreasonably; it was too proprietary, and not sufficiently reverential.

'You are splendidly fit, Doda. And—yes—you really have got a new frock.'

Dorothea laughed.

'It's a standing joke of Ral's that I wear my dresses to rags,' she said. 'That's the only thing we ever quarrel about.'

'That, and the Work,' said Alaric.

'I don't know what you could possibly find to quarrel about in the work,' said Lord Ravage a little stiffly, 'as far as your mother is concerned.'

'Ah! of course,' said Ral; 'my mother is the most tremendous success, and it's because I think so enormously of her that I maintain she would have been a greater success still if she were less of an impressionist—thought more of the technique and less of the idea. No, I know you won't agree with me, my lord.'

'I—and my books—would have been the worse off if I

had,' replied Lord Ravage. 'It is to the Idea—which I spell with a capital as you do the Work—Ral, that we are indebted.'

'Well,' said Ral good-humouredly, 'there's one sentiment you will certainly agree with me in, which is, that when one has such a mother he is naturally anxious to put her in a suitable frame.'

'Dear Thea,' murmured Mrs. de Burgh, 'Alaric is almost a shock to me. I find it quite impossible, when he is away, to believe that you have a grown-up son.'

'Who has successfully made the round of the world,' put in Sebastian Blythe. 'Have you brought home an exhibition, Ral?'

'Yes; and listen, Blythe: are you still on the *Hemisphere*?'

'I do an occasional interview for it,' modestly returned Mr. Blythe. 'Do you want to get on to the *Hemisphere*, Ral?'

'I want the *Hemisphere* to get on to me—to sit on me; not on my chest—I should find it heavy: the weight of its whole imperial policy, you know—but on my work. I want it to criticise me, to praise me, to abuse me, to advertise me. I'm palpitating for advertisement. I'm on the doorstep waiting to be advertised.'

'Advertisement is vulgar, Alaric.'

'No, it isn't. Not when you are going to have an exhibition of your paintings, and your whole future career depends on how it turns out. I'm the very youngest artist that ever had an exhibition all to himself; remember that when you begin to puff me. You'll promise to come to my private view, won't you, Mrs. de Burgh? And you'll talk about it to your friends, and you'll bring as many pretty women as you can muster, and let people know beforehand that they're going to be there? You see, I'm modest, and realize the importance of other attractions

besides my own pictures. It's my ambition to block Bond Street, and I can't do that without assistance.'

'Well, if that's your ambition,' said Mrs. de Burgh, 'I advise you to secure the assistance of the South Sea Island Princess. I hear she blocked the Terrace of the House of Commons yesterday; and somebody was saying that if she can get the right person to float her she will be the sensation of the season.'

'Lady Tregellis will do that,' said Mr. Blythe. 'I want someone to bring me into touch with the old lady, so that I can arrange it.'

Whereupon Dorothea gave her invitation to luncheon on the following Sunday, which was accepted.

'I should like to know this young lady,' she went on. 'This is the second time to-day that I have heard of the lovely Samoan, and I'm behind my times. Please tell me all about her. Princess what?'

'I'm afraid she is not placed in the Almanach de Gotha,' said Lord Ravage. 'I had the honour of being presented to her to-day, and she was called Miss Kaia Aldenning.'

'Then,' said Sebastian Blythe, 'one of her three dearest ambitions is fulfilled. She had set her heart upon meeting Lord Ravage.'

'The second, which she confided to me, is fulfilled also,' said Ravage. 'It had the happy effect of counteracting any undue elation I might have felt at the honour conferred on me personally by the first.'

'I know what that was. You don't mean to say, sir, that she pulled it off?'

'Yes. You will be amused to hear'—and Lord Ravage turned to Dorothea—'that I saw Gavan Sarel, reluctant but admiring, being dragged along the Terrace by the Progressivist Whip to be presented to Miss Aldenning.'

Dorothea uttered a scarcely audible 'Ah!' and Mrs. de Burgh exclaimed:

'I thought Mr. Sarel was a woman-hater!'

'No. I should say from what I see and glean that Sarel is only an ambitious politician, wise enough to realize woman in the abstract as a possible impediment in the path he has cut out for himself,' answered Lord Ravage with his smile of gentle humour.

'Well, do you know,' said Mrs. de Burgh, 'I don't think he is quite right there. Women are often of the greatest assistance to ambitious politicians;' and she adduced some famous instances.

'What is the young lady's third ambition?' asked Dorothea abruptly. 'I am really curious to know.'

'Oh, a much easier one to gratify,' replied Blythe. 'Miss Aldenning wishes to become acquainted in private life with a few peeresses. That's the third ambition. Sounds like a fairy tale, doesn't it—the three wishes? She is perplexed as to whether these ladies carry their coronets about with them.'

Mrs. de Burgh laughed.

'But what sort of a creature is she?'

'A most innocent and ingenuous barbarian, who has only been ten days in England, and knows as much about civilized life as a young gazelle,' replied Mr. Blythe. 'Her great charm is that she doesn't in the least mind asking questions—of course setting her beauty on one side, which isn't an easy matter, for it is overpowering.'

'Did it overpower you?' asked Dorothea of Lord Ravage.

'Oh, her beauty,' he answered absently—'yes, certainly. She is very beautiful; it is a most uncommon type.'

'Somebody was saying that she doesn't look like a South Sea Islander, and that she is almost fair,' said Mrs. de Burgh. 'Samoan women are supposed to be very

lovely, are they not? But I always understood they were dark and had thick lips.'

'The young lady is not a Samoan,' said Lord Ravage. 'I am told that she is the grand-daughter of the native King of Arru. If you look on the map, Mary, you'll find the island of Arru close by North Australia, and part of the Dutch possessions, running with Dutch New Guinea.'

'Doesn't the old man want a concession, sir, or something of that kind, in New Guinea?' asked Blythe.

'He would have to go to the Hague Government for that, I presume,' said Lord Ravage.

'Arru!' exclaimed Mrs. de Burgh; 'I never heard of it. But if the girl is Dutch, why has she got an English name? What business has she to be turning the heads of the people down at the House of Commons?'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' said Blythe. 'Her mother may be Arruan, but the father is a loyal British subject in North Australia; and the girl's skin is no darker than Mrs. Queste's, though she has the great black appealing eyes of—I can only think of a Eurasian, and there are no eyes more magnificent. Her hair is a sort of dark chestnut. I suppose that there she favours her father, whose red beard is as a fiery flame reaching to the four corners of the earth.'

'And the father,' asked Mrs. de Burgh, 'is he possible?'

She addressed her brother, but Lord Ravage shook his head.

'The division-bell rang, or we thought so, and carried us all off. It turned out a false alarm, but lost me the opportunity of making Mr. Aldenning's acquaintance.'

Mrs. de Burgh referred her question to Mr. Blythe.

'Yes,' was the answer. 'He is so absolutely without manners, and so rich, that he is quite possible—in London society.'

'Where did he get his money?' asked Alaric. 'Do you know, sir?'

Alaric's manner to Lord Ravage was that of an aide-de-camp to his chief.

'I heard he had been a pearl-fisher,' said Lord Ravage, 'and that he owns miles of oyster-beds.'

'I believe, my lord, that he owns a good deal more than oyster-beds,' said Blythe, deferentially correcting the statesman. 'I've been working up the information. There are submarine cables and railways as well. He's a great speculator. I heard, too, a most romantic story about the real source of his wealth—that it came, in the first instance, out of a wrecked Spanish galleon somewhere on the north coast of Australia, and that on dark nights he used to man a boat with desperadoes and dive for the treasure.'

'Now, I have always thought,' exclaimed Alaric, 'that there you have a certain way of making money, and this old man seems to have found it out. It only needs a little research—on land, I mean, as well as deep-sea diving. You've got to read up and find out about lost vessels and their track, and pitch upon the most likely reefs for them to be wrecked upon. I suppose one could get at something in the old archives, of the time they left port, destination, and so forth.'

This diverted the talk from the new beauty to buried treasure in general, but Alaric brought it round again, with the air of one taking notes.

'It's the Arruan Princess who interests me more for the moment than wrecked ships,' he said. 'I want to know exactly where she comes in.'

'The original Princess?' said Blythe.

'Isn't she the original Princess?' asked Alaric.

'No, it's her mother who was the genuine Arruan. Aldenning and his desperadoes carried her off. She

really was a Princess outside the Almanach de Gotha, Lord Ravage. Aldenning married her—quite regularly—and Miss Kaia is their only child. Happily, the original Princess is dead.’

‘I like the notion of the Princess and the wrecked treasure and the pearls—leaving out the railways,’ said Alaric, ‘and keeping to the submarine business. It’s a distinctly decorative scheme.’

‘At all events, the northern coast of Australia gives play for romantic conjecture,’ said Lord Ravage, pouring himself out a glass of some delicate amber wine in the straw-covered flask of its country which stood by his side. ‘And as Alaric says—pearls, a wrecked galleon full of gold, the Arruan ancestry, and a beautiful girl—one couldn’t have a more decorative scheme.’

‘I can vouch for the pearls,’ said Blythe. ‘She was wearing a rope of them with a pince-nez at the end of it. As far as get-up goes, Miss Aldenning is distinctly Parisian, and quite up to date. Even you, Ral, couldn’t have found fault with her costume.’

‘Or Mr. Elwyn,’ put in Mrs. Queste, jerking herself with an effort into the conversation. ‘Suggest to him that the Arruan young woman would launch his new paper a good deal better than Mrs. Olver.’

‘I must know that young woman. I must design her a dress, I must paint her portrait,’ said Alaric, with a little movement of his head and contraction of his lips, which Dorothea understood as signifying that he had formed a purpose he meant to carry out. ‘In the first place, she must certainly be at my private view.’

At that moment a telegram was brought to him.

‘From my dealer,’ he said, after reading it. ‘I am to meet him this evening and settle the details of the exhibition. You see, I lose no time. Pray, my dear Sebastian, lose none either in puffing me.’

Conversation now drifted into Eastern waters. Alaric had a good deal to tell of his adventures and impressions, and, with Sebastian as chorus, told it very well. Sebastian had been interviewing colonial Governors for the *Hemisphere*, and had also some drolleries to relate; for it had happened that the two men were for a time travelling together. Mrs. de Burgh and Dorothea encouraged their stories, and Lord Ravage, conscious, perhaps, of being a little out of his element, and anxious not to be a drag on the talk, took pains to show a statesmanlike interest in the manners and customs under discussion. He even inquired affably what Alaric had meant by his allusion to scrimmages, and if they had in their wanderings in the East seen anything, for instance, of the anti-Russian feeling or the conflict of political interest in Korea.

'It wasn't that, sir, exactly,' replied the youth, with a quizzical glance across the table. 'Sebastian's conflicts were personal rather than political, and they usually took place on steamboats. Didn't they, Sebastian? Any way, this is how it was.'

'I don't think that anything you have to tell about me could possibly interest Lord Ravage,' hastily interposed Mr. Blythe; but Lord Ravage professed himself deeply interested in all that concerned Mr. Blythe, so was Mrs. de Burgh, and Alaric went gaily on.

'He had his arm in a sling when we picked him up at Port Said. He said it was an accident. Two different P. and O. captains told me of other accidents. They said they had been obliged to take precautions for Sebastian's safety.'

Mrs. de Burgh questioned innocently, though Mr. Blythe turned red and gave an uneasy laugh of bravado.

'Go on, Ral; you'll be sure to make a good story out of it; and *you* know, Mrs. Queste, how much truth there's likely to be in Alaric's good stories.'

‘It isn’t a story at all,’ said Alaric. ‘I assure you it’s quite true about Sebastian’s tendency to accidents. You see, Mrs. de Burgh, Sebastian has quaint theories about life, and some people don’t understand them—suburban husbands, for instance. Of course, we in Bohemia—for *you’re* in Bohemia now, you know—do understand quaint theories; but it’s always the suburban people that travel nowadays, and suburban husbands are narrow, and resent artistic principles, especially in relation to wives. You know, that’s the way accidents are liable to occur among passengers on P. and O. boats.’

Everybody laughed, and so did Sebastian himself, parrying the attack with a counter-thrust. But he looked anxiously at his hostess, and presently, while Alaric engaged the attention of the other two, bent forward and murmured:

‘My reputation should be safe in your hands, at least, for *you* know of a contradiction to Ral’s libels which no one else knows.’

Dorothea had been gazing abstractedly at the Lent lilies in those same Delft bowls, for the sake of which she had in former lean years denied herself some small luxuries. Her silence all through dinner had been noticeable.

‘I . . . I wasn’t listening. What do I know?’

‘You know,’ he answered, ‘that my allegiance is sworn, even though it be without hope of reward.’

‘One thing I do know,’ she said, looking at Mrs. de Burgh, ‘which is, that Mr. Blythe and Alaric have made us shamefully late over dinner, and that unless you have your coffee at once, Mary, the oration at the Water-gate House will be half over before you get up the stairs.’

‘I have been so interested,’ said Mrs. de Burgh, ‘that I quite forgot the time. Yes, please make haste, Mr. Blythe. I’ll allow you one cigarette. In the meantime, would somebody see if my brougham has come back?’

Dorothea and Lord Ravage were alone. Mrs. de Burgh had driven off with Sebastian Blythe to the Watergate House, and Alaric had gone to meet his dealer, announcing that he would probably celebrate his return to European civilization by a late night at the Roscius, of which club he was the youngest member.

'Just to let the newspaper people know I'm back again,' he said, 'and to see how the old impressionist set is getting on—who has come up in the painting world, and who has gone down, since I went away. I want to fire off some of my enthusiasm. I'm chock full of ideas just now, Doda. Almost mightest thou persuade me to be an idealist. This is the best work I've ever done, and I've got a new medium for water-colour, and an entirely fresh method in oils. We'll talk it over to-morrow, that and other things. Good - night, dear.' But he lingered: 'Been doing well?'

'Oh yes, Ral. As you said, I'm a success—more of a success than ever.'

'You needn't tell me that; I can see it. What a splendid person you are!'

He held her a little away from him, admiring her.

'I sometimes wonder whether, if you hadn't been my mother, I should have fallen in love with you. You are the only type of woman I have ever seen in my life that I could have fallen in love with.'

'Such a long life of twenty-three years!' Dorothea laughed unsteadily. 'You've got time yet, Ral.'

'Oh, there are other ways of counting age than by years. On my own computation I'm thirty-three, and you are twenty-five. Really, as I see you to-night, you don't look a day older. Well, dear, I hope you'll enjoy your *tête-à-tête* with your elderly adorer.'

'Don't, Ral! You mustn't say things like that to your mother; it sounds disrespectful.'

‘My mother is like the wife or the mother of all the Cæsars—above the mere suspicion of disrespect. You might have a million adorers, and there would not be a question in my mind about each one of them paying you the same reverence that I do, because I’m certain he couldn’t be your adorer unless he did reverence you.’

‘Is that truly how you feel about me, Ral?’

‘Truly, I revere you absolutely. For me you are the one woman untouched by human frailty. To come back to you after the sort of feminine atmosphere I’ve been getting whiffs of lately—Lord! it’s like putting back one’s goddess on her pedestal. Never let my faith in you be shaken, mother; for that would mean the destruction of my faith in the whole tarnation sex. But, thank Heaven! it’s impossible.’

Dorothea gazed up at her son with eyes that seemed like those of a suppliant.

‘No, no, Ral; I’m the same as all other women—no better, and no worse—and as full of human weaknesses as the rest.’

‘You are *the* woman for me, at any rate. I mean every word I say, though I’m puzzled to know why I’m doing the emotional act to-night. You used to complain that I was so wanting in sentiment. Honestly, Doda, I believe that I’m intoxicated with the sense of power that’s come over me lately—the certainty I feel that this exhibition is going to make a name for me. It *is* good work, and I shall go further very soon. I’m only now seeing my way—feeling my artistic feet, using my will-force in the right direction. I’m only just beginning to realize what I’m able to do with men and women and pigment. It’s dogged determination that does the trick, and I’m determined to succeed.’

‘You *will* succeed, Ral.’

‘I know it; and now good-night till to-morrow.’

'Oh, Ral, I wish you had telegraphed! I would have kept this evening free.'

'That would have been a misuse of opportunities,' he answered, glancing back at the door, through which was audible the sound of Lord Ravage's hesitating tread upon the stair.

The elder man had lingered in the dining-room in order that the mother and son might have these few minutes alone. Alaric kissed his mother and departed, saying his good-night to Lord Ravage on the landing.

'You'll be going on to the House, I suppose, sir, presently?'

'Presently,' repeated Lord Ravage. 'Things are dull this evening.'

'You had a flare-up last night, though,' said Alaric.

'And now we are in the mood of reaction after our triumph in making the Government take back their Bill. But all this will be new to you.'

'I heard two fellows talking about it in the train; they said something about a want of confidence motion. Will the Government go out?'

'That,' answered Lord Ravage, with grim suavity, 'will probably depend upon Mr. Sarel.'

'Or upon you, which is more likely, isn't it?'

'Not at all. All the papers this morning are saying that it is the Progressivist party which is able to make or unmake a Ministry.'

'Did you mean that?—I'm not talking of the papers,' asked Dorothea, as he seated himself close to her.

'Do I mean it? Well, they seem to hold the balance of power.'

'But they can't vote with the Tories on any great measure of reform.'

'In the history of English political reform,' said Lord Ravage, 'the great measures have been brought in by the

Whigs and rejected, and they have been carried by the Tories on the strength of Radical support. We old-fashioned Liberals are becoming nothing more than wire-pullers, and Mr. Sarel is clever enough to see this, and is shaping his policy accordingly. He tried his power last night—the Bill itself was nothing—and he proved it when he walked down the division-lobby behind us with his following, and pulled down the Government majority from sixty to ten. But I'm not going to talk politics with you to-night, Dorothea; I see by your face that something has happened. Tell me what it is.'

She answered at once:

'I have had a letter from my husband.'

'Ah, that is somewhat surprising! And it has brought you disquieting news?'

'It has brought me the news that he has cancer in the throat, and that in all probability he will only live a few months. He thought it his duty, he said, to tell me this, that I might be prepared for my approaching widowhood.'

Ravage laid his hand on hers with a gesture of sympathetic comprehension.

'But is he justified in taking so serious a view? In such cases I believe it possible to operate, and so prolong the life for a considerable time.'

'He tells me that an operation is out of the question. He seems to have faced the situation. There was a stoical resignation in his letter which I admired—a note of real feeling, too, I thought, in regard to me that touched me strangely. It set me wondering whether I ought not to go out and nurse him.'

'You—to Baziria?'

'To Baziria. But on reflection I foresaw that it wouldn't do for me to disturb his domestic arrangements, and also that probably he would not welcome me overwarmly. There is a Scotch doctor in attendance on the King,' she

went on in a different tone, 'who has received gracious permission to attend on my husband as well. I believe that he is a very clever man, and Richard will have all the alleviations to his pain that would be possible here.'

'Does he express contrition—gratitude?' asked Ravage. 'Has he any desire to see you?'

'He gives sign of none. Oh, contrition! Yes, contrition for having kept me a prisoner in matrimonial bonds, as he puts it. Gratitude! I suppose he ought to feel some; he doesn't say so. And, after all, things are fated, and we take our chance. If, as Augustus Charafta would tell us, we plant in one life and reap in another, why should anybody worry about gratitude or remorse? We only get our deserts. I did for my husband no more and no less than what it was my fate to do.'

'You saved his honour, and kept him out of the felon's dock; that's a good deal. I have often wondered why you stuck to him.'

'So have I,' said Dorothea. 'At the time I could not have told. I followed my instinct, which for a woman is always the safe thing, according to woman's generalizing. A man would say that it is safer to look straight at all the circumstances, weigh them well, and be guided by reason. No. How can one look straight at anything when one is closed in by a sort of quickset hedge of emotion? To face trouble fairly, one must stand out bare and desolate in the open. That's the only way to start afresh in the world, as I did, afterwards, when I began to study art in Paris.'

'The thought never occurred to you that you might have divorced him and gained your freedom?'

'What motive had I for that? Freedom was then to me an empty name.'

'Ah, Dorothea! If at that time I had known you!'

'It is well for you that you did not. In any case, I was held back from even considering such a course. My instinct

wouldn't let me desert a drowning man. I *had* to try and pull him out of the water. And recollect,' she added, 'in saving him, I was saving my son's fair name as well. It was for Ral's sake. And it's for Ral's sake that I've worked hard and lived straight all these years.' She paused a moment or two, and then went on as if forced against herself to candour: 'I mean straight in the world's eyes. I will not declare that I have maintained my own self-respect, but it's something, anyhow, to say that I have not forfeited the respect of society. Alaric would think a great deal of that.'

'Dear,' he said tenderly, 'I sometimes fancy that you are a little disappointed in Alaric.'

'Ah, my friend,' she answered, 'there's a sordid tragedy of motherhood, about which you can know nothing. I think I first realized it one day when, coming in tired and dusty from my morning's marketing, I found Ral up on an unexpected exeat. He fingered the shabby bag I was carrying, and looked fastidiously at my cloak, and remarked disapprovingly, quoting a compliment he had heard paid to another garment—part of my war-paint, and not to be worn recklessly—"They couldn't say of *this*, mother, 'From Paris, *ça se voit*.' It is so evidently out of a King's Road omnibus." Since then I've been careful not to jar Ral's sensibilities in that way, and I think I satisfy him, notwithstanding what he said this evening about the length of time I wear my frocks.'

'It would be strange if he were not satisfied,' said Ravage. 'I have heard other women say that you dress like no one else, and always perfectly.'

Dorothea made a little gesture of acknowledgment.

'One can go a long way with a few old brocades, an artistic reputation, and some point lace; and now that Sylvain can speak English as well as anybody, I let him do his own marketing. But in those days I hadn't thought

out the scheme, and so I used to spend the lamplight hours in turning and trimming old dresses, and I always travelled third-class, and mended my gloves, and minimized starched frills and laced petticoats. Oh, how should you understand a woman's petty economies! All a mistake. Better starve than look a frump. It was wiser to go without butter and meat, except on Sundays, which was how I managed keeping Ral at Marlborough, till my work caught on, thanks to you.'

'Oh, Dorothea!' he said reproachfully. 'And I guessed nothing of it. And I was there, the head of your family.'

'But not of Ral's father's family. Besides, then you were in the exuberant phase of our relationship, which forbade the acceptance of favours except in the way of legitimate business. We hadn't settled down into the calm friendship which goes with middle age and faded charms.'

'For me,' he exclaimed, 'your beauty can never fade, nor your glory wax dim.'

He got up as he spoke, and went to a bookcase, where he searched for a moment or two, taking down a volume and carrying it back to her. It was one of his own works, written before he became Lord Ravage—written in his struggling days.

'Will you let me read you a passage which struck me last night when I was revising this for the new edition? I should like you to hear it.' He turned over the leaves, and then read: "*I have always endeavoured to think of her only as she bade me. The resolutely-quenched fire of passion has left no blackened waste behind it. I shall always think of her as one remembers some early scene of youth which remains in the mind unalterably beautiful, quite immortal, through age and sorrow and the change of all things else, and time and decay, up to the very threshold of death.*"' He closed the book. 'Those words

I wrote many years before I had met you, and they came wholly from my imagination. I had no such feeling about any particular woman then. I have such a feeling for a particular woman now. I don't know that there is anything in life better worth having than the feeling which gives those words life and meaning.'

Dorothea was deeply touched. He saw the emotion in her face, but she did not speak. When he had put the book back and returned to her, she said abruptly, passing over the little episode :

'I don't want you to suppose that I am disappointed in Ral. On the contrary, he is exactly what, for his own success in life, I should wish him to be. There are few natures pure gold like yours. If all men were of your quality, no women in the world need weep—certainly not the tears of disappointment and disillusion, which scald and sear most cruelly. It would be unjust to judge other men by such a standard. No; instead of being disappointed, I should be proud, since, rightly or wrongly, I've managed to inspire Ral with quite the proper sentiment towards his mother. Just before you came in, he was speaking of his reverence for me, saying that the destruction of his faith in me would be the destruction of his faith in womanhood. All I can say is, Heaven preserve the faith which rests on so poor a foundation!'

'You speak bitterly, Dorothea, and unjustly to yourself.'

'If so, it is because I know my world for what it is, and myself for what I am.'

'Why are you always making these veiled self-accusations?' he exclaimed. 'There's no reason in them. What are these evil-doings of yours at which you so darkly hint? Now and then, a yielding, perhaps, to the cry of your nature under conditions the most trying, under temptings of situation the hardest to resist. And you have resisted.

Surely I have a right to defend you—I, who know you so well !'

'You ! . . . Ah, you !'

'Dorothea, there is a tone in your voice which troubles me. Is it only that you are agitated and shocked by the news you have heard, or are you hiding any other cause of grief from me? Could that be? We have lived in each other's confidence for almost ten years. My heart has been bare to you, and I have believed yours to me. We have been very close to each other, in most sweet and tender love-friendship. It is strange how that closeness has held us, without the too-dangerous growth of effusion; it is strange, unique, strengthening. Have you not found it so, Dorothea?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'Then I do know you better, it may well be, than you know yourself.'

'No,' she cried, 'for there is something in my life which I have hidden from you, and which to-night I have the strongest impulse to confess.'

'Tell it to me, then, dearest soul; it could never alter my love for you.'

'Oh, how many times have I forbidden you to love me!'

'That is beyond your power, as it is beyond mine to obey.'

'Ravage,' she said, her eyes meeting his full, and falling abashed beneath the deep tenderness of his gaze, while her voice was hard, from the agitation she was trying to subdue, 'it is all very well *now* to talk of a sentimental love-friendship, and to accept it as something unique, strengthening, as you say, and, since the temptation was overcome, not dangerous.' He made a slight gesture. 'Not dangerous,' she repeated, 'because—you are right, I *was* tempted, and I did resist the temptation, and the temptation no longer exists.' He drew in his breath, as

though she had hurt him, but said nothing. 'Yes, it's all very well now, but by-and-by——' She checked herself, then rushed on impetuously: 'There's another thing I must say. It was not only your chivalrous honour answering to my appeal which has safeguarded me, nor my affection for my son. There was something else.'

'What was that?'

She was silent. Instead of answering, she got up, and passed behind Ravage's chair and waited, the thought of other issues involved coming to her, and quenching the impulse to a confession she had hardly strength to withhold under the stress of his imploring gaze.

'Don't tell me,' he said hoarsely, 'that it was your love for another man?'

Words seemed to be trembling on her tongue but they were not uttered. The impulse was drowned in the consideration of what yielding might imply, and she almost smiled at the whimsical notion that a nation's destinies might hang on the yes or no of an artist-woman living in Chelsea. But these are incongruities which from the days of the Pharaohs have operated in the making of history.

'It is impossible!' he said.

'Impossible!' she echoed.

She had meant to gain a moment's respite to prepare herself for the stupendous yes or no. Her voice was colourless. He accepted the reply as an affirmation, and again drew a long breath, but of relief.

'Of course it is impossible. The suggestion was an insult. Forgive me, and forget it.'

There was a new silence.

'I have not lied,' she whispered to herself.

An immense yearning towards him overswept her. He had always been so loyal. How she could have loved him had Fate so willed it! Charafta's fantastic theory recurred

to her once again, and she wondered vaguely what in that former existence of which the mystic had spoken had been the strange tangling of their destinies which made him love her so nobly, and prevented her from loving him in return. She let her hand fall upon his shoulder, where it rested with a caressing touch, and he found in this answer sufficient to his momentary doubt. He put up his own hand and imprisoned hers.

'Tell me this thing, Dorothea.'

'I must not,' she said—'I cannot—yet.'

The 'yet' was a further reassurance. No doubt she alluded to some disgraceful circumstance of her married life of which he was ignorant. She would not tell him till her husband was dead. That was how he interpreted the whole thing. As if it could make the smallest difference to such love as his!

'No matter. Don't distress yourself. I can wait patiently. You shall confide in me or not, just as much and just whenever you please. Go on, my dear, with what you were saying at first—that it is all very well now to accept this love-friendship of ours, and, indeed, I cannot give our bond a truer name. But what then?'

'Now that the world knows I have a husband living, and that there can be no question of anything but friendship, I am able to receive you freely. But when I have no longer that protection, and must be more careful of appearances——'

'Well?'

'Words, which mean little at present, would have to be avoided then as meaning too much.'

'Then, when barriers were removed, they would mean just what they have always meant under the limitation of those barriers.' He turned in his chair, and would have risen and drawn her down facing him but for her gently-restraining hand upon his shoulder. 'They would mean,'

he went on, 'that you are the one woman in the world whom I would wish to make my wife.'

She bent down now, and her lips touched the crown of his head.

'You *are* pure gold,' she murmured. 'You *are* true—true to the very core. Ravage, you really would marry me?'

'Gladly, proudly.'

'You, who have been, and will be again, Prime Minister of England?'

'I know of no law which forbids a past, and possibly future, Prime Minister from taking to wife the woman he loves.'

'Yes, when the woman is such as I am.'

'Dorothea, I will not have you say words like those.'

'Yes, you must hear me. I am not worthy to be your wife. I am not worthy to be loved by you. I deserve nothing from Fate so splendid as what you offer me.'

'You deserve from Fate the most splendid gift she has it in her power to bestow—far beyond anything I can give you. Yet I could make some offerings not quite to be despised, Dorothea. Often and often, dearest, I have humoured my fancy in thinking of what things I would do if I could, to make your life easy and smooth and bright, to keep away all jarring influences, and shelter you against any kind of trouble that a man's strong protecting love may serve to avert. . . . No, no, my dear one! not that. It is I who should kneel to you'; for she had sunk down by the side of his chair, with her head buried in its arm, and he saw that she was shaking with sobs.

He soothed her as he might have soothed a child, raising her and leading her to the sofa, and making her put her head back upon the pillows, while he drew a rug over her and ministered to her with the tenderness of a woman.

'You are overwrought: that's nothing but nervous shivering. There, let me chafe your hands. The letter

upset you. And then the strain of those people this afternoon, and Alaric's return, and Charafta with his mystic fantasies, and now I—myself—I, with my impatient love! There was want of feeling in a sense—want, perhaps, of good taste—in what I have said to-night. This was not the moment for it. But I wanted you to know all my heart. I wanted you to have the absolute certainty that, in whatever chance or change might befall, I should be there, and you would have my arm to support you, my unwavering devotion upon which to rely. It would be for you only to choose. My dear, I am not all vain and egotistic. I would not take everything for granted. And, meanwhile, you shall see that I can be loyal. I will say no more till you give me the sign that I may speak.'

He moved away from her, having gently laid her hands, which he first kissed very quietly, within the rug.

'You are going?' she said.

'Yes—back to my world of men, back to the strife of Westminster.'

'Ah, I had forgotten the political crisis.'

'It is not a serious one—yet. Last night's division, as I told you, was a mere trial of arms. Both sides would like to defer the real battle till there's something to go to the country upon. But there's no doubt that the Government has been a good deal damaged, and anything might happen any day.'

'Have you——' She hesitated. 'Have you had any talk with Mr. Sarel?'

'No; not much would come of any such talk, and it's our best policy for the moment to avoid each other.'

'But you would be willing to discuss matters in a general way—to hear his views and aims?'

'I should be quite happy to meet Mr. Sarel—let us say, on neutral ground,' he answered, with a sort of interrogative reserve in his tone.

‘You know,’ said Dorothea, still with hesitation, ‘that I am one of the few women in London—perhaps almost the only one—who can boast of having any social relations with Gavan Sarel?’

‘I inferred the fact from things you have said. But I never ask questions upon any subject about which you yourself don’t talk to me freely. That is one of my little punctilios in regard to our compact, and I had a fancy somehow that Mr. Sarel was one of those subjects.’

‘You are always generous,’ said Dorothea; and there was an embarrassed pause.

Presently Ravage said:

‘I conclude, however, that the social relations don’t amount to a great deal? I know that you painted his mother’s portrait.’

‘She is dead, poor lady!—he adored her. No,’ she went on, ‘my social relations with him do not amount to a great deal. I never talk of them, for if people—Lady Tregellis, for instance—knew that I was acquainted with Sarel, I should be bored to death by entreaties to show him as the lion of a studio tea-party.’

‘You would be safe enough; he wouldn’t come.’

‘No; but the importunities would go on.’ Again there was a pause. Dorothea added: ‘Combined, you and Sarel would carry the country.’

‘I am not anxious to carry the country,’ he replied, ‘and I dread the notion of being robbed of my sweet literary leisure. Frankly, I have no desire for the turmoil and the responsibilities of leadership. I prefer to be what I am in the House nowadays, a figurehead on the front Opposition bench. And there are points upon which Sarel and I could never combine. He goes too far.’

‘You mean in wanting to make the House of Lords elective?’

‘In that and other things, though I admit the principle.

Greece is the only country I know of that has one chamber. England wouldn't stand that yet.'

'If you admit the principle, you are halfway to the reform. And Gavan Sarel would admit on his side that no great reform can be accomplished in one bound. His idea is that the reforms of to-day are the necessary means of inducing new reforms to-morrow, and that he must mould and use the political material as he finds it.'

'In other words, that he is an opportunist.'

'No; only that he allows no intervals for "rest and be thankful." . . . You would go with him on the Education Question, though, and in his teetotalism.'

'And in his moral purity creed,' said Lord Ravage, with a faintly humorous smile. 'There he appeals to two classes—the idealist and the respectable citizen. But, setting private opinion apart, can one bind Leviathan with packthread? Can one enforce a law by thundering a moral precept from electioneering platforms? Gavan Sarel's influence lies in the fact that apparently he practises what he preaches. I admire him for that, and I should be glad to think that there are many men as well as women, instead of few, who think that a married man should keep to one wife, and that if he has not got a wife he should sacredly wait for the destined one. But I fear that human nature is not yet ripe for legislation in the matter.'

Dorothea did not answer. Ravage noticed how wan and worn she was, and reproached himself for having thoughtlessly remained to bore her with politics.

'I may come to-morrow,' he said, 'and see how you are?'

'Certainly. Come primed with the talk of the lobby.'

He smiled.

'Yes; I shall bring you my scraps of political news, as one equally devoted, but under more poetic conditions,

might bring his "most sweet heart" a cluster of dew-dripping roses.'

'Oh, dreamer! dreamer! They are right in saying that you are more poet than leader of men.'

'Do they say that? Well, I shall undoubtedly have as poetic a feeling about my bits of lobby gossip when I come to you as though they were blossoms from the Vale of Tempe. . . . And the dear, vague hopes of to-night!' He bent over her as he whispered tenderly: 'Let me say just this: Are they dreams? No, not merely dreams, Dorothea. I dream of many things, waking as well as sleeping. Some of my day-dreams have turned into dear delightful realities. Why not others? . . . And so good-night, my honoured lady, my "most sweet heart."'

He came back for a minute, however, in affectionate solicitude.

'You won't sit up for Alaric? You'll go to bed now and rest?'

'Not quite yet; I'm too tired to move. I shall rest here. And'—she seemed to search for an excuse—'there's a letter I ought to write.'

'Scratch it off now, and let me take it down and post it at the House.'

'No; I must first collect my scattered thoughts. Turn out some of the lights, and leave me here to dream. I too may dream my waking dreams, may I not?'

'So that they bring you peace and joy, dream on, my dear,' he answered; and, obeying her, he left the studio in darkness, but for one shaded electric light behind the sofa and the glow of the fire, which he replenished before going out.

He was curiously thoughtful in such small practical ways where Dorothea's comfort was concerned. Presently she heard the hall door clang behind him, and then all was silence in the house.

'Peace and joy!' Dorothea repeated half aloud. 'Shall I ever know what they really mean, I wonder? Oh, I should have been wiser if I had followed my intuition, and obeyed the mysterious voice within, which told me not to let into my life that influence which has banished peace.'

She got up, shaking away the rug, alert, and showing no sign of indulgence in a waking dream. From the square opening of her dress, where it had lain upon her bosom, she drew a sheet of thick paper, with the House of Commons heading, and which contained only two words—'Yes, to-night.' She kissed the written characters with a passion strangely different from the gentle emotion she had shown during her interview with Lord Ravage. Then she threw the note into the fire, where it shot up a bright blaze. After that she sat on the hearthrug thinking for ten minutes or more, and then she spent another ten minutes in pacing the studio.

A heavy tapestry curtain veiled off the models' entrance and a staircase leading to a small door which gave straight out upon a side-court. Neither staircase nor door had communication with the dining-room, and led to no other part of the house. Dorothea drew aside the tapestry, went down the staircase, and opened the door. For a moment she looked out on the night, which was dry and clear, the fog having lifted. No other buildings were approached by the court, which was in reality a piece of waste land, with a couple of old trees upon it, and these screened the narrow foot-passage from Dorothea's door to what seemed the wall of a mews behind. She left the door on the latch and went back to the studio. In there she closed and locked the other door communicating with the rest of the house, so that it was impossible that she could be disturbed except from without. Having made these preparations, she could only wait, and the length of time

she must do that would depend in a measure upon whether there was storm or calm at Westminster.

Dorothea lay down again among her cushions and covered herself with the rug. She was so still that anyone looking on might have fancied that she was asleep, but for her eyes shining forth like stars above the dark fur of the rug, and gazing out over the shadowy recesses of the great dim room.

She was wide awake, or at least believed for a time that she was so. Indeed, she must have been awake, she argued to herself afterwards, for all through the experience which followed she never seemed to lose hold of her own personality. The shadows melted into one another, and the things in the room—the furniture, easels, lay-figure, the brasses, bronzes, and china jars, and all that miscellaneous bric-à-brac which appears indispensable in these days to a woman's artistic work—became first indistinct blurs, then ceased to have any objective existence; for everyday life was blotted out. The curtain, of which Dorothea had spoken to Charafta, was lifted, and the dream-scenes were now being enacted on the empty stage.

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IN THE LIFE OF DREAM

WERE they merely dream-scenes, the fantasies of imagination left rudderless, or a picture of past events preserved in the Divine memory—that imperishable record of the All-Consciousness, which is in truth the Judgment Book of God?

And might it not be that under certain conditions physical matter becomes to the prepared sight penetrable by the finer vibrations of an unknowable Force, so that in these conditions the eye of man's spiritual Self is able to discern that which must be for ever hidden from his corporeal senses?

But the conditions? How to develop the inner vision? How to prepare the intellect for a right understanding of that which is of the spirit, and not of the body? Charafta had said that to this end the spiritual Self must withdraw itself from the gates of the senses into its innermost sanctuary, whence alone it may look forth and judge rightly, whence alone all knowledge may be obtained.

Thus, too, had spoken prophets and mystics and seers from the beginning of Time. These had told that the centre of thought is within the Self, that in this innermost sanctuary of man's being there is a point of light, a Spark from the Divine, a Pivot on which each individual existence turns, a spiritual vantage-ground to which the soul that would probe the mysteries of the universe must first attain.

In the strange state of waking-dream into which she had fallen, Dorothea's brain seemed to herself to be working in quite logical sequence. The simplest of analogies flashed upon her, confirming the spiritual truth now revealed, that here, within the Circle of Divine Memory, all things are present and Time is not.

The analogy which occurred to her was that of human memory. Did she not know in her own case that, though the events and feelings of youth were gone, and could no more return to her in actual experience, they remained, nevertheless, in her consciousness, an ever-present reality, a possession which in the normal course could not be taken away? So in the Great Mind, in That which contains the Beginning and the Ultimate, there can be neither past nor future. Here Time has no measure ; everything is Now.

Other analogies came into her thought, especially those suggested by Charafta, when he had expounded to her his creed of spiritual evolution. Was it not true, as he had said, that science, which admits development from the ape to the man, denies it from the man to the Angel? And yet in the world around her, was there not living proof of intermediate grades between ; say, the negro fetich-worshipper and the scientist himself ; between the gaol-bird from the slums and the Catholic saint, between even one of Winnie Tolvean's Guardsmen and Augustus Charafta? In these ordinary examples might not reason find arguments in support of Charafta's belief in the evolution of the soul through many forms of being? Following Charafta's idea, Nature is indeed ever ready to hold out the symbols of hidden truth ; and as night succeeds day, as winter comes after summer, as the tree sheds its leaf vesture to renew it year by year till the parent root shall have fulfilled its appointed term, so may not the soul have its waking day and night of dream—one waking day making but an infinitesimal portion of an ever-changing but con-

tinuous life of æons? May not the soul, too, cast and renew its mortal vesture, sleeping and rising again, re-clothed with fresh faculties, dwelling anew in other fleshly habitations, yet remaining in essence the same? Had she not herself experienced rare illuminated moments, when that innermost sanctuary of the Self had seemed to have been almost gained, and the soul, freed from its carnal prison, had viewed its past way backward, down the ladder of lives stretching between eternity and eternity?

There swept over Dorothea's mind, dimly illuminating its dark corners, the idea of an all-pervading, all-comprehending Consciousness, ensouling the worlds visible and invisible. In this idea, it now seemed to her, might lie the germ of many obscure sayings in different scriptures, and the real meaning of the early Greek Pantheism which taught so clearly the oneness of God and Nature. Here, too, might she find the explanation of those metaphysical topsy-turvinesses, the Illusion and the Reality, the Appearance and the Essence, the Shadow and the Substance, over which she had vaguely pondered in the course of desultory studies that seemed to have had always an irresistibly mystic bent.

Dorothea's reading had taken many turns from the beaten track, and her knowledge thus acquired represented a curious mass of undigested truth and confused speculation. She remembered Plato's doctrine that everything in the visible world is a mere terrestrial image cast by its celestial archetype, a reproduction in matter of the pattern created by the Divine Reason, and everlastingly dwelling within It. She reflected how from all time Spirit and Form have been held distinct from and yet connected with each other; how Type has ever been external, and emblems and symbols have been employed for the conveyance of Truth lying beyond all forms, and to which only spirit dematerialized can attain. What was language but

a rough symbol of thought? and thought itself but the blurred reflection of that luminous Intelligence which illumines and sustains earth and heaven?

So if Matter were but here the shadow of spirit, earthly love, even in its utmost perfection, could be no more than the symbol of Love Divine, Love Eternal, enfolding not only the individual, but the universe, stretching to further bounds than human eye can reach—bounds that, like Spirit Itself, must be limitless.

And if, indeed, the Memory of the Divine enshrines all memories of man, must not that Divine Love contain, too, in Itself, all the qualities of human love, beautified and perfected?

So it seemed to Dorothea, as with this new lucidity of vision her mind stretched out towards the Unknown. Though her lower nature cried aloud for the gratification of its human desires, the higher part of her, reaching forth through the clear light that for the first time seemed to break and spread around her, began to apprehend something of the Love beyond.

Knowing the limitations of the lower love, and dissatisfied with them, she began to yearn after that higher love, after something less transitory, stronger, and more comprehensive. Strange stirrings thrilled her. She felt within herself for the first time promptings towards not only understanding, but of rising to the possibility of that Greater Love; and she dimly realized that as the dewdrop, tiny though it be, may reflect the sky, so the loving heart of a woman, if her love prove itself unselfish and pure, may show forth the Love of the Divine.

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Now, in what came, it seemed to Dorothea that she had no break of recollection, and that there was no moment during which she lapsed into sleep, awakening in dream-land. Yet, there it must have been that, with all her

everyday senses active, she was playing a part in scenes which had, nevertheless, none of the usual dream incongruities and impossibilities, but were as distinct and verifiable as a description in Homer or a section of the Parthenon frieze.

And this experience was not like what she called 'seeing pictures,' where she might be, as it were, an indifferent spectator of a sort of ethereal cinematograph exhibition; for though she knew herself to be a looker-on at the show, she was all the time a part of it, participating in the doings and feelings of another self—herself and not herself, since there was even more than the double consciousness. Rather it seemed to her, in a wonderful and bewildering way, that she was a combination of several selves, each one stretching feelers back into a dim, forgotten past. Also she was faintly sensible, in that other personality, of the possession of powers and of intelligence beyond her ordinary limit; but there was always the feeling of a link missing, a spring wanting, by means of which those potencies might have been brought under the control of her will. She became deeply interested in the opening of this dream-story, which was so strange, yet so curiously familiar. Only one figure from her actual life came into the new world created out of the mists into which her studio had vanished, and that not as an actor in the drama, but, as she fancied, a sort of showman, standing outside the stage. It was the presence of this figure which, when it was impressed upon her, made her say once to herself, '*I am dreaming.*'

This figure was Charafta, shrivelled, bent, yet very life-like, with his splendid head, his white beard, and the piercing eyes she knew, and with one arm upraised, as though in blessing, just as she had seen him a few hours back on that very spot, when he had bidden her good-bye. She told herself, in this dream yet no dream, that the

present Charafta must be an apparition, for how could he have returned to the studio? It was impossible that he could have been concealed there all along, equally impossible that he could have been admitted in the ordinary way after Ravage's departure; besides, had she not herself locked the studio door? Still more impossible that he could have come in by the model's entrance, of which only she and one other person had the key.

It seemed a proof of her being awake that she could thus reason; but now she thought no more of the things of this life; that other life opening before her was too entrancing. The studio existed no longer, its shadows had rolled away, and its dim nooks had become luminous with the glory of Southern sun, fragrant with the wild odours of the *Ægean*. In very truth it was as though for her the west wind shouted over a wine-faced sea. She felt its balmy breath upon her face; the intoxication of youth and joy ran through her blood. Mother Earth yet wore the gorgeous garments of godhead, and she herself was divine Nature's nursling.

She saw in the dip of full-bosomed hills the blue waters of a sunlit bay and the golden sands of its curving shores. She saw gleaming near, against a sapphire sky, the Ionic columns and graven façade of a marble temple; while over on a more distant knoll, rising like the white limbs of a group of unclad women from among gray-green draperies, she saw among the olive groves another temple rearing itself in peristyles and pointed pediments and slender shafts, where winged Hermes poised and Aphrodite kissed the sun. She stood among sacred olives and vines; her feet crushed the scented thyme; the oleanders were in blossom; the bees scattered pollen from the opening myrtle-buds; around her were anemones, white and red and purple, and there bloomed cyclamen, and jonquil, and narcissus—flowers of the gods.

And Dorothea knew that here was fulfilled the dumb yearning which all her life had pained her, a longing inexpressible for the warmth and blue of that Greek sky, for the bland perfume of the vine-leaves and the acrid sweetness of plucked ivy, for the glory of man's strength and the bloom of love—for all that is contained in the poet's phrase, 'wild honey and the East and loveliness.'

As far back as she could remember, her pulses had stirred at sight of the tendril curves of marble capitals and the pale sublimity of sculptured gods; and her heart had found its echo in certain strains and harmonies, such as Gregorian chanting, the singing of reeds in the wind, the songs of particular birds, and other sounds which seemed the survival of a once-beloved and more natural woodland music.

Her ear thrilled again now to the melody of ancient lyres as a choric procession mounted to the temple on the hill; the old gladness rang out at sight of the youths whose fingers swept the strings, fair models for Apollo, with chaplets on their radiant brows, smiles on their lips, vigour in their limbs; and there seemed to mount in her veins the innocent madness of the grape-juice, at the piping of a file of boys, free, beautiful, and frolicsome as young fauns, who shrilled from their reeds the primitive music of Pan.

Yes, the old Hellenic spirit after three thousand years of repression exulted once more, revelling in this opulence of Nature, this splendour of physical form, this delicious savouring of earth's gifts—exulting, above all, in the grateful worship of nature-gods—those dear, dethroned divinities; in the cult of beauty and the joy of life, which is the heritage yet unlost, bequeathed by our Homeric forefathers to us votaries of the later religion of sorrow. Yet unlost! Praise be to Demeter and Dionysus, who, while earth puts forth her green, can never be laid away

nor forgotten. For the old Pagan ghost still walks our modern ways, refusing to sleep beneath its Christian tombstone, and the unsatisfied Pagan yearning cries passionately aloud in the Voice of To-day.

And in this dream in which lower-world faculties were wide awake, and reason, undream-like, seemed to exercise full sway, the words of a poem of Béranger, which Ravage had read only the other day, recurred to Dorothea, and she repeated some verses to herself, dwelling with a hitherto unknown delight not only on the beauty of the cadences, but on the sentiment which gave to them a living fire :

*' Arrachez-moi des fanges de Lutèce ;
 Sous un beau ciel mes yeux devaient s'ouvrir.
 Tout jeune aussi je rêvais à la Grèce ;
 C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais mourir.*

*' En vain faut-il qu'on me traduise Homère :
 Oui, je fus Grec ; Pythagore a raison.
 Sous Périclès j'eus Athènes pour mère,
 Je visitai Socrate en sa prison.
 De Phidias j'encensais les merveilles ;
 De l'Illissus j'ai vu les bords fleurir,
 J'ai sur l'Hymette éveillé les abeilles :
 C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais mourir.*

* * * * *

*' Partons ! partons ! la barque est préparée.
 Mer, en ton sein garde-moi de périr.
 Laisse ma Muse aborder au Pyrée :
 C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais mourir.*

*' Il est bien doux, le ciel de l'Italie ;
 Mais l'esclavage en obscurcit l'azur.
 Vogue plus loin, nocher, je t'en supplie ;
 Vogue, où là bas renaît un jour si pur.
 Quels sont ces flots ? quel est ce roc sauvage ?
 Quel sol brillant à mes yeux vient s'offrir ?
 La tyrannie expire sur la plage :
 C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais mourir.*

*'Daignez au port accueillir un barbare,
 Vierges d'Athène ; encouragez ma voix.
 Pour vos climats je quitte un ciel avare
 Où le génie est l'esclave des rois.
 Sauvez ma lyre, elle est persécutée :
 Et si mes chants pouvaient vous attendrir,
 Mêlez ma cendre aux cendres de Tyrtée :
 Sous ce beau ciel je suis venu mourir.'*

And as she softly murmured these words, the dream took movement.

Up the olive-grown slope the procession passed, stepping with a sort of rhythmical movement and gesticulation to the measure of the invocatory hymn. Priests carried the holy emblems and ivy-wreathed staves ; temple virgins dressed in white and blue, with rose-garlands binding their classic heads, shed flowers as they passed—daffodils and pretty pansies, pale hyacinth and the mystic asphodel, in homage to the maiden-bride, goddess of spring and death. Young disciples in white tunics, wearing chaplets of glossy green, waved branches in their hands, their adolescent voices ringing out in the swell of the dithyrambic chant, while other youths, crowned with pink apple-blossoms, led sheep and heifers, twined also with flowers, that they might receive command of the goddess to produce and multiply when the high-priest should call upon Demeter to bless the flocks and herds, the fruit-time and harvest.

Behind the priests and virgins and the youths and musicians on lyre and pipes came the populace, clad bravely and flower-decked, bearing likewise offerings of blossom and leaf, wheat in the blade and new-formed grapes, and all the people joined with one voice in praise of god and goddess by whose bounty were given corn and oil and the red wine.

Foremost among the crowd following, Dorothea saw a troop of soldiers. They looked like the figures on Pheidian

reliefs, goodly men, grand, daring, long-haired, straight-eyed, with ornamented helmets and gold and bronze bossed armour. One of these seemed to her braver and more splendid than the rest, a man beautiful and royal as they said of the old heroes. She watched him with an absorbing interest, entering in some mysterious way into his thoughts and sensations, feeling the strong pulse of his manhood, the pride in him of a general and of a conqueror returned from war. The clash of the soldiers' spears and bucklers blended with the notes of reed and harp and the voices of priests and maidens. A wilder exultation crept into the hymn, which became more Bacchic and less devotional. It was as though the fiercer passions of the warriors were infecting and overpowering the gentler and more religious emotion of the rest. Dorothea felt in the same strange inward manner that this man's soul was heated with lust of love as well as of conquest, and as she passed with him under the temple porch, she felt her own bosom throbbing with something of the same wild longing, which was half transport, half terror. Then the scene changed, not with any abrupt darkening or the likeness of any stage mechanism, but in some curious mental fashion, so that, scarcely realizing how the transition had been effected, Dorothea found herself inside the building. It was lofty and restful, with the sense of repose given by perfect proportion of all parts and that peculiarly soothing quality which seems inseparable from ancient marble. A double row of fluted columns rose on each side of the central aisle ; all the wide space was filled with worshippers, and the light came softly in upon bowed forms, upon the plumed and shining helmets of the soldiers, and the green offerings which made verdure on the pavement. At the north end was a raised place separated from the crowd by a crimson cord stretching across the temple. Here stood the altar of the goddess, and above it a marble

Demeter sat enthroned in the majesty of perfect beauty and of benignant calm, while on either side of this central image were statues of lesser gods, twelve in all, each one seeming the expression imperishably fixed of some superb attitude of physical grace.

Lower, and nearer the congregation, burned the sacred brazier, set in a tripod with three slender handles of curious design, and behind it, with his face turned to the south, stood the high-priest alone. He was tall and stately, and of a sweet and noble countenance, with eyes that seemed to pierce the hearts of those who gazed upon him. He wore a long white robe, and his head was bare. A little way behind was ranged a semicircle of priests of lower rank, and behind these again, in a wider and deeper half-circle, the youths and maidens who had formed part of the procession. The chant had changed in character; it was low and monotonously appealing, and the youths waved their branches to and fro in solemn movement to its stately measure, while the high-priest scattered incense upon the burning coals in the brazier.

Again the music changed, swelling louder, and the youths stepped forward and laid the branches on and about the tripod, and the maidens their garlands. Then out burst a grand and stirring song of invocation; the priest stretched out his arms, and the people kneeled and saluted.

And now it seemed to Dorothea, as the magnificent strains pealed upward filling the temple, that her own consciousness drew itself inward and remained in a small space by the feet of the goddess, a sort of lesser shrine at the core of the pageant. And yet it seemed to her, too, that here the pure ecstasy of Demeter's rite was quenched and stilled, and the shrine held by a rival divinity whose favours could only be sought in cruel sacrifice and licentious worship. At this spot, slightly apart from the circle of

priestesses, sat a woman on a simple stone tripod—a woman whom Dorothea knew intuitively to be one with herself.

As she entered this woman's atmosphere Dorothea was swept into and engulfed by a very whirlpool of emotion in which the wildest earthly passions surged, and mingling with them, a remorse and dread belonging wholly to the supernatural world. It was the remorse of a fallen angel ; and following the fancy, Dorothea pictured a tortured soul leaping down from its hardly attained heaven, sacrificing all paradisaic bliss that it might sink into the embrace of a lover in hell.

And that loved one, passion-doomed ! He was there, below her, beyond the crimson cord, his head unbent, his bold eyes searching the eyes of the priestess. So two hearts, each borne along by its overmastering desire, met and were joined in that vortex of passionate feeling—the heart of the priestess forsworn, and the heart of the warrior forsworn also, and faithless to the wife awaiting him, who had dared to profane Demeter's sanctuary, and was panting now for sacrilegious spoil, in comparison with which the loot of cities and the guerdon of fair slaves were as nothing.

Dorothea knew in the same inward manner that this priestess was of higher grade than the other temple virgins waiting on their probation to be admitted into the holy mysteries. Her white robes were fashioned differently ; her beauty seemed enhanced by her greater paleness—the unearthly pallor of one who chews the sacred laurel-leaves—and her dark hair was bound by the golden fillet which proclaimed its wearer an initiate in the lower degree, chosen by that High Adept in charge of the temple community to be, during her inspired trances, the mouthpiece of certain Divine teaching, which his spirit from a distance delivered thus to the people.

Never in her life of the present had Dorothea imagined experience so overwhelming as that of this double consciousness, for all through it she was tortured by an impotent realization of the priestess's occult powers, and the knowledge that these were lost irrecoverably, leaving only the maddening certainty that, while she had been and might now be more than woman, she had condemned herself to exist within tighter fetters than those which bound the ordinary woman ignorant of exalted possibilities. It was this bewildering blending of the Now with the Then which made her torment. Waves of recollection seemed to roll towards her and envelope her, paralyzing her body, but giving a wonderful impetus to her intellect. She had the sensation of being one immense brain upon which at all points memory pressed. Pain she could not call it; the feeling was vast intoxication—a kind of foretaste of omniscience; an exaltation of nervous force, so exquisite that she knew it must end in the breaking of some physical or ultra-physical spring. She waited for this, and the snap came; the pressure of that past was more than mortal organism could endure. For a moment her world swirled in chaos. She lost grip on form, even upon definite thought. The temple, the pageant, the figures of priests and virgins and congregation, and the immortal smile of the marble goddess—all were swallowed up in this flood of retrospection, and nothing remained but the consciousness of that miserable priestess, and the most drear, the most intense feeling of woe—woe not merely human, but with that note in it of the supernatural—a note echoed back in the lingering cadences of the Pagan hymn, which was the last thing left to her of that temple by the Ægean. This music had not before struck her as rich in expressive harmonies. Now in some fantastic confusion of imagery it seemed to take a kind of mediæval character, and through the thin sweet modulations of the lyre there

sounded something of blood and ruth and gorgeous gloom—something, it might be, suggestive of the tragedy underlying Nature even when she displays her most joyous and irresponsible aspect; typical, too, perhaps, of the tragic side of love, and of many a splendid ravisher who, like the dark Aidoneus, sweeps his victim away in a golden chariot to the gloom of an underworld.

Dorothea roused herself from the paralysis of her physical faculties with the feeling that she must do something to make permanent the impression of what had happened, lest it should escape when she awoke, as former impressions had done. She wondered if she were really awake, and then it was that she again beheld the apparition of Charafta, lost in the excitement of the temple scene, and told herself that she was still dreaming. Of course, the whole thing had been a dream. And she remembered that she had awakened before now with the thrilling recollection of beautiful music, such as she had never heard with her bodily ears, echoing through great marble piles, and of religious ceremonies something like, but less definite in detail than that she had lately witnessed, and which were quite outside her ordinary experience. She did not remember ever before having felt such strong emotion in a dream, certainly not of that particular description, though she had before now gone through variety enough of feelings, and those of sufficient keenness to make her dream-life often more intense than that of every day. It was this intensity which puzzled her. Why should emotion be more thrilling, and imagination more active, in dreams, when the senses slept, and the mind had no body upon which to register its impressions? It did not seem reasonable.

The phantasmal Charafta took up her train of thought as though she had spoken aloud.

‘Ah, that’s the mistake you make. It is the argument

of the oyster. Imagine a liberated oyster gauging Nature by means of his limited senses ! It would be to him a world of miracle. And yet there are no miracles. There are few mysteries, and those only of the Highest. There are no breaks in Nature. All things grow out of each other—and all things in earth and heaven are bound together in one continuous chain, the name of which is Love. But to go on with our simile. Imagine ourselves with twenty, or even ten, senses, and a power of motion equal to the velocity of light ! Well, why not, as the race develops ? The difference is no greater than between the oyster and the man, and evolution never comes to a dead stop. We know that there are kingdoms invisible below us ; why not kingdoms invisible above us ? Is the fact of being able to live two lives—an incorporeal as well as a physical one—more marvellous than that greatest of all marvels—the mechanism by which we live at all ?

'You mean that there *are* two lives possible to us—two conscious and interchangeable lives : the life of the physical world and the life of dreams ?' asked Dorothea.

'Certainly. Isn't so much clear to you ?'

'I think so. But at the present moment I seem to be broad awake, and can hardly conceive of myself as dreaming. Yet there are some things which make me almost sure that I am dreaming. You, for instance. I know that you cannot be in my studio in the flesh, although you speak and move as if you were in full possession of your bodily senses. Why are you here ? How have you come ? And in what body do I see you ?'

Charafta made a slight expressive gesture—that of turning the palms of his hands outwards—a gesture common with him when asked a question he could not, or would not, answer. He did not answer this one.

'Besides,' he said presently, taking up the earlier thread, 'how do you know that when you dream the senses sleep,

and that the mind has no body upon which to register its impressions? I assure you that the body of dream, for those who have been taught to make use of it, is a far more capable and sensitive vehicle than the body of flesh.'

'Have I been taught to make use of it?'

'Yes, long ago; and it is knowledge which, once gained, is not lost.'

'Have many people been taught to make use of their dream-bodies?'

'Not a great many.'

'So that I am in advance of the herd? And I really have two bodies which I can put on and off as I please?'

'At present,' replied Charafta.

'Why do you say "At present"? Am I going to lose the use of my body of dream?'

'No; but you may gain the use of yet another—the body of thought. In due course of training you will learn that every sphere of matter has its appropriate vehicle of consciousness, and that rarer matter exists than even the stuff of which your dream-body is made. The Ether is the limit of the physical; beyond the Ether lies Emotion, which is also matter; and beyond Emotion lies Thought.'

'And beyond Thought?'

'Is Love.'

'And beyond Love?'

'Lives Spirit,' he answered reverently

'But,' said Dorothea, 'these are not unfamiliar and inaccessible spheres. Love I know.'

'You know its shadow,' said Charafta.

'Oh, more than its shadow!' she exclaimed. 'Love has been to me a most cruel reality.'

'If you have found Love cruel, then you have indeed known only its distorted shadow. Yet once, in your long progress through the ages, you did grasp its spiritual

reality.' Charafta's voice grew deep and musical, as when that afternoon he had talked to her of Asphalion. 'Once long ago in old Egypt,' he went on, 'before the Lord of Worlds willed the Law's reform, and the Christ came to establish it and renew it, you passed through the Lesser Mysteries, and gained the Path, from which you have since wandered long and far.'

'The Path?' she said.

'The Way of Wisdom,' he answered, 'in course of which the Divine Babe, born of God in man, walking through all its human stages, and making of the flesh, in its nobler uses and affections, an aid, and not a hindrance, reaches the heavenly manhood. This is the Path by which the soul may enter that Realm of perfect Bliss and absolute Unity where every pure aspiration for another's good frees spiritual force in aid of the beloved, where all unselfish prayer finds its answer, and all unselfish passion its fulfilment. For there, Spirit manifests Itself in the great Out-giving, by which the Universe, visible and invisible, is sustained; there the World-Saviours move and have Their being; there Love is heaven, and heaven is Love. And this first union of the soul with the All-Oneness is the secret of Beatific Vision, of the Trance Divine of the Mystics, of the Ecstasy of the Neo-platonists. It is the root of all faiths, the interpretation of all mysteries.'

'I have read of the Ecstasy of Plotinus,' said Dorothea, 'and of the mystic teaching of the old philosophers. Do you mean that in some former existence I was the pupil of one of these?'

'You were more than the pupil,' Charafta replied, 'you established your claim to the Opening of the Doors. You were one of the Chosen—one who, having stepped into the stream, as the Vedas put it, may never cross back again. Though the flesh may still hold that one captive, though his feet may stumble, and his eyes be blinded, and his

heart wax faint, and though through life after life he may fall back in repeated failure, yet the disciple to whom the Door has been opened must, in the fulness of time, abide within the Temple, and have his habitation among the Blessed.'

'Tell me of that ordeal which you call the Opening of the Door,' said Dorothea, on whose inner ears the phrases sounded as might an imperfect translation into a bald tongue of subtle truths imparted in some all-comprehensive language since wholly forgotten. 'What was that sacrament or rite that I went through, and which has so wonderful a meaning?'

'That rite,' he said, 'was the outer symbolism of an eternal verity revealed in part to the soul of the neophyte, but which the full-grown divine self in man can alone comprehend. According to its prescribed form,' he continued, 'you, the neophyte, after preliminary trials and mortifications, were bound upon a cross—signifying the binding of spirit to matter—and remained for three days and nights entombed beneath the Pyramids. Thus, your body, rigid and to all intents dead, was on the fourth morning raised from the grave, and awakened by the first rays of the sun as they struck Memnon. In those three days and nights your soul descended into Hades, learning the secrets of dreams and death and hell, and then ascended beyond the seventh heaven, where it tasted of the fulness of Love and Joy ineffable. This admission into Paradise was the seal of the Initiate; never more could he be as he had been. In that timeless flash of the Supreme Consciousness certain Divine knowledge became the property of his immortal Self, and in that Self he was able to glimpse the world-scheme, and to realize that in the neophyte's initiation the whole spiritual tragedy and triumph of man is brought down, made flesh, and completed; the death and burial of the carnal nature symbolized, and the resurrection

of the Christ-self within. This thing *was* and *is* long, long before Jesus the Divine Essene walked among the Jews in Bethany.'

'I—I an Initiate!' Dorothea's voice was awed beyond recognition. 'I cannot be; I am not worthy. The thought is profanity.'

'It may well seem so,' said Charafta, his own voice deepening in a solemn and compassionate manner. 'Which one of us may stand in the presence of the All-Father, who nevertheless is long-suffering and of great mercy to the least of His children? In the childhood of the Race those mighty Ones who watched its destinies did not ask so much as now from the seeker after wisdom. Conscience was not so highly evolved in humanity—the possession of spiritual vision was rarer; and thus among the ancient priesthood, a disciple in whom the subtle body was fully developed—the dream-body, as you know it—had a claim to be initiated into the Lesser Mysteries. Later on it was when the Great Master decreed that purity of thought and conduct should alone be the key to open that door to the aspirant.'

Dorothea bowed her head in silent self-conviction.

'You have seen,' Charafta went on, 'how you forfeited that key. You saw yourself, the chosen priestess, who forsook her sacred calling and defamed the holy altar, selling her heavenly birthright at the price of one short month of sinful rapture. You saw yourself, tempted, fallen, yet with the glory of the Initiate clinging around you, as it clings still, lifting you above the herd, marking you, in spite of human backsliding, as one of the elect. For then it was written in the Book of the Recorders against you:

"Once more shalt thou tread the Path, but not yet. In pain, failure, and disappointment shalt thou seek it anew. Thou shalt pass the Portals only across thy slain

self; and thou shalt reach the goal, but not till the watch-word of two dreary lives has been—Expiation."

'Here'—and he stretched out his arms to her in a gesture that reminded her of the high-priest invoking Demeter's blessing on the people—'here, learn your claim upon those who were your sponsors at the consecration of yourself to Him who is Lord of the Race. You asked me what I am and why I have come to-night. It is for this.'

'Father!' cried Dorothea, as in one illuminated moment the ineffaceable tie of the past flashed upon her.

'Yes, the answer is given to you now of the question you asked me this afternoon—why do I care for you? You were the child of my flesh in those old days among the vines and olives of beloved Greece, and you remain still the child of my spirit.'

'This is the reason I was so drawn to you,' said Dorothea—'the reason I felt that you, and you only, could explain to me things of which I dared not speak even to my closest friend.'

'Ah,' said Charafta, with his wonderfully sweet smile, 'you see that the common human relationships have a mystery and a meaning far beyond this life. They are the debts and the affinities brought over from other lives, each having its special sanctity, its special obligation. So that the family environment of every one of us is no mere chance concurrence of individualities, but a link in the vast chain binding the whole human family to its All-Father. Somehow, as I passed the Consumptive Hospital on my way here to-day, this thought was strangely present in my mind.' He had paused, and resumed in a gentle, half-humorous conversational tone: 'It was roused by a silhouette impression—a flashing glimpse as my cab went by—of a sick old man bidding good-bye at the porch to a young girl—his grand-daughter, maybe. They were poorly dressed, evidently of the uneducated class; but the

soul spoke in their faces, in the instinctive trust and affection of that farewell glance they gave each other. To me it was the glimmering illustration of a Divine truth, and I knew that, should the old man die to-night, and the young girl see him no more, the purely human tie was not undone for them, but would bind their lots together in a life to come.'

'And you and I,' asked Dorothea—'have our lots been often bound together?'

'For many lives,' he answered, 'we have gone hand-in-hand—as father and child, brother and sister, friends dear to one another as were David and Jonathan. Far back we were together in Plato's Atlantis, in the City of the Golden Gates, while the Divine dynasty reigned and spiritual evil had not yet prevailed. Together, too, we went down beneath the waters in the great destruction of which Plato tells. We saw the first Pyramid built that it might be the storehouse of the holy Symbols brought from the doomed land. We were in the country which cradled our Western race, over which the sands of the Asiatic Desert now roll, but where once were cities with palaces and temples, and where the gods walked the earth, and took to wife the daughters of men, that the type might increase in wisdom and fairness. So the old myths had an origin and a purpose: though Pan is dead, once he lived, and Nature spoke in a language which her children of the favoured groves and fountains heard and understood. We were priest and neophyte under Pharaoh Menepthah, and parent-priest and Vestal when the Master, who is Asphalion, made your body the instrument of His knowledge, and while you were in trance, taught the higher truths through your lips.'

'Oh, if He was so near me then,' cried Dorothea, 'why has He forsaken me now?'

'He has never forsaken you,' said Charafta. 'Truly,

He sticketh closer than a brother. For thousands of years He has watched, guided, marked you for His own. It was you yourself who forsook Him when you turned aside from the Path along which He had led you. He was near you in the magnificent corruption of Rome when you sinned the sin of which your life here is the penalty. There, in your remorse and bereavement, He—who was Flamen Dialis—drew you once more within shadow of the temple, but you had forfeited the right to enter. In your innocent childhood, among the red firs, you beheld His face, and if your eyes are darkened now, it is because none but the pure in heart may come into the presence of the Lord.'

Charafta's voice died away in a distant but distinct murmur. A soft drowsiness—the drowsiness of impending unconsciousness—fell upon Dorothea. It was as though these were the last words falling upon waking senses, and as if by his mystic utterances the old man had lulled her to a sleep within a sleep.

* * * * *

She was dreaming now. Yes, this she could not doubt, for it was that well-remembered, tantalizing dream in which the Closed Door was never opened. Always the same dream : she had dreamed it many times without variation.

It was always the same lightly wooded hill that she was climbing, walking along a rugged path towards an abutting spur on which grew some silvery pines with a distant ice-clad peak rising above their vandyked outline. The sun was shining, and the air felt crisp and exhilarating, with just a touch of chill. Always she looked down upon the same valley, with the snow-fed torrent foaming in its bed, and the jagged firs standing out darkly against the light green of the opposite slope. Along the path she travelled were at intervals very old, mossy and gnarled rhododendron-trees—not shrubs, such as she had seen in other countries, but trees resembling no rhododendrons that

she knew. And this little detail impressed itself vividly upon her memory, and made the landscape seem more real, for according, as she supposed, to the season of her dream, the trees were in flower or bare of bloom.

She knew that when she reached a certain point skirting the belt of feathery pines, she would see on the other side of it a white stone house, the walls straight up and down, with loopholes of windows, something like the Arab houses she knew in Algeria, and at some little distance from the house another building, which she took to be a mosque or temple, though it was not on the pattern of other mosques or temples. Notwithstanding, however, its religious character was strongly borne in upon her, and this not from observation of its interior, for she had never been even inside the outer court ; yet she had the fancy that on some future occasion she would be allowed to enter it.

For invariably at this point a man met her, and always the same man—a man dressed in a white woollen garment, and wearing peculiar hide shoes suitable for mountain-climbing. Not an East Indian, though his face suggested that type, only it was much fairer than that of the fairest Hindoo she had ever seen, and his eyes were blue.

There was nothing very specially exalted-looking or remarkable about this man, though the face was dignified and full of earnestness. Dorothea had the feeling that he was not the master of the house, but in a subordinate position of some sort, and that he had been instructed to bring her to the master. She could not recollect that he ever gave her any but a silent greeting. They always walked together to the white house, and paused before a door which was always closed. Dorothea used to wonder each time whether the door would open ; but it had never yet been opened. Always, as she had stood there waiting and hoping, the dream ended, and she either awoke or remembered no more.

SCENES

IN THE WAKING LIFE

BUT to-night—ah, surely to-night!—the door would be opened to her, and she would see the Master.

At last—at last! There was the grating of an inner lock, the sound of a footstep . . . and then the sense of an approaching presence; a breath upon her cheek; the wave of warm air from within, meeting the draught from the opening door.

Dreaming yet, she started from her couch. It seemed to her that she flung herself at the feet of a form into whose face she dared not look, uttering the cry of the Magdalen:

‘Master!’

But now there came an inexplicable revulsion; her sleep-dazed eyes stared vacantly. Then she felt herself imprisoned within strong arms, crushed against a firm breast. This was not the pure, pungent air of pines and mountain solitudes, but the heated, indefinable exhalation from man’s world, the curious faint odour of cloth, of cigar smoke, of a Russian leather pocket-book—letters—she knew not what.

‘My Thea, what is this strange dream I have awakened you from? I am sorry to have startled you.’

Dorothea released herself partly from the encircling

arms, and, holding her head back, still gazed bewilderedly into vacancy.

'Where—where is Mr. Charafta?' she stammered.

'Charafta! How should I be able to tell you? Probably asleep in his bed. Were you dreaming of him? Was it Charafta you called "Master"?'

'Charafta! Oh, no, no!'

'Then you meant me—myself?'

'No.'

'Yet I *am* your master; you have said it.'

'Yes, I have said it.'

She had recovered herself, and now moved a step or two away from him.

'Why is this? Are you glad to see me?'

She did not answer, and he added:

'I'm prouder of being your master than of being leader of the Progressivists.'

'It does not seem so,' she said.

'Thea, you are cross. You know it *is* so.'

He looked down at her from his great height through half-closed lids, which darted a fiery beam that subdued her while she resented it.

'Yes, it is so. I do know it. You have conquered me, and I suffer for it.'

'Dorothea!'

'Yes, I suffer for it,' she cried passionately. 'You abuse your power. Would you have neglected me as you have done lately if you had been the suppliant instead of the conqueror? I have waited and watched. Was ever proud woman in such humiliating subjection? Watched and waited, and you have not come.'

'You must have guessed the reason. I feel sure that I was followed on the last occasion when I left you. I suspect Sebastian Blythe.'

'Oh, absurd! What could have been his motive?'

And why should he prowl about Chelsea at an hour when a professional diner-out and party-goer like Sebastian should have been making himself useful to some of his patronesses ?

‘Yes, yes, I know. But he writes for the papers, and the prowlings of a journalist in search of copy are incalculable. Besides, as regards his motive, surely it is sufficiently crude to be obvious. The man is in love with you, and he is ass enough to bray the moon outside his lady-love’s front-door.’

Dorothea gave a hard little laugh.

‘You forget, my friend, that I am growing old.’

‘For those who love you, you have the gift of eternal youth.’

‘I am growing old,’ she repeated drearily, ‘and it is you who make me realize the fact.’

The man said nothing, but removed his overcoat, laying it on a chair. He gave a slight shiver.

‘By Jove! it’s cold to-night, and your fire is almost out. May I put on a log?’

‘Please. I must have been a long time asleep. It was blazing when—my people left me.’

He drew the embers together, and laid on more wood, coaxing a blaze. Then he stood up with his back to the chimney, facing her, and the central electric light he had turned on when entering fell full upon him. He was a magnificent type of man, physically speaking—over six feet, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with close-knit frame and well-developed muscles. One could readily understand his having been famous as an athlete. His face, without being strictly handsome, gave the impression of great power. No stranger could see him without asking ‘Who is that?’ and when the answer came, ‘Gavan Sarel,’ the stranger would say to himself that this man was what Gavan Sarel might have been expected to be.

It was like a mask, the face—impassive but for the occasional leaping fire in the steely gray eyes, the chin squared, the nose very slightly beaked, the lips set in a somewhat cynical smile. They were beautiful lips, the curves fine enough for those of a woman's mouth, only that no woman would have had that curious expression of restrained will-force. The face was clean-shaven, except for a thin moustache that did not conceal the mouth; the hair, close-cropped behind, was gray-dusted in front, and had one gray lock, which hung heavily forward, and which Sarel had a habit of shaking back when impatient or annoyed, almost the only sign he gave of such weaknesses. But for his grayish hair he seemed in the full vigour of man's prime.

Such was Gavan Sarel, the founder and leader of the Progressive party. He had been called the 'gladiator of the House of Commons,' for he had literally fought his way to a hearing. He seemed to fight for the sheer love of fighting—in a dogged, bull-dog kind of manner; fighting at first without a cause; then, when he had made a cause—or, rather, many causes, for he would take up and turn into a crusade any out-of-the-way wrong—he fought for himself, that he might make himself a Power. For power was what the man loved, though he made a show of being indifferent to popularity. And he had accomplished his object, fighting sullenly, working in silent, brooding fashion, taking not even the men of his own party into his confidence; deaf to all social blandishments, refusing to enter even political salons, disdaining the invitations of great ladies, and being rarely seen in public, except on political platforms and in his seat below the gangway in the House of Commons. Yet his influence was great.

He was respected by his enemies as a man of nerve, and as being consistent even in what they called his want of principle; while by his own party and by opponents alike

he was certainly feared. It was rumoured that the Tory leaders, seeing in him a foe to be conciliated, had entered into a secret understanding with him, by which his support for certain Government measures had been secured. Now that he had thrown over the Government, it was prophesied, without apparent show of reason, that Lord Ravage, the retired Liberal leader, would find it possible to combine forces with the Progressivists, and would thus come into power, with the country at his back, strong enough to carry any measure through the House. Lord Ravage as Prime Minister and Gavan Sarel as an important member of his Cabinet—that, it was said, would be a coalition which might long rule England.

A strange, reserved, fateful being—Gavan Sarel. Even in oratory his strength lay not in ornate periods, but in saying simply and directly the thing which he meant to say. He had all the Celtic gloom, for, like Dorothea and Ravage, he, too, was of Irish descent, with none of the Celtic expansiveness, none, outwardly apparent, of the Celtic poetry. And yet, Dorothea's intuition told her that beneath the outer crust there were hidden fires, and that Sarel was in truth capable of the madness of the fanatic.

He stood watching Dorothea as she sat, her eyes softly large, her face flushed and troubled, still partly under the spell of that strange vision, yet plainly showing the sort of mesmeric influence which, rebel as she might against it, his look and touch always brought to bear upon her.

Under Sarel's mask-like quietude, there seemed something of passion in leash. Suddenly, without a word of warning, he went to her, took her in his strong arms, and placed her back among her furs and cushions; then, kneeling beside her, he kissed her ardently—upon the laces which covered her bare neck, upon her chin, her eyes, her lips, from which it seemed as though his own could not

sever themselves. And she, pliant, transformed, made young and fair once more by the immortal youth of a great love, yielded herself with a movement of intense tenderness, and, clinging to his neck, found relief in his kisses for the heartache which had tortured her.

At last they could talk to each other. All their first coldness had melted away, and there was no longer the sense of separateness. Woman-like, she made him tell her again and again that he loved her as much as in earlier days, and there was no lack of enthusiasm in his assurances. They agreed that, no matter what reserve prudence might dictate when they were apart, it was impossible to withstand the magnetic attraction which, when they met, forced them into contact and harmony.

'I dislike the word "magnetic,"' she said. 'It makes me think of guinea palmists and afternoon-tea parties; but one can't call the attraction anything else than magnetic—there's no other word to express it. And it really isn't a question of age or beauty or anything outside itself. As long as you are *you* and I am *I*, our hands could never come within reach of each other without instinctively joining.'

Her fingers twined closer round his and drew them up to her lips, while he settled himself more comfortably at her side.

'Call it primitive instinct,' he said. 'That's nearer the mark.'

The words changed her mood. She spoke impetuously, angrily.

'There it is! And how utterly crude it all seems! For ever the primitive instinct! I always seem with you to be knocking against a dead wall. There *must* be something higher beyond—something more than a mere heritage from the apes. And I expected to discover it through our love for each other. I've thought of love, and

approached it as a sort of Divine revelation, and it resolves itself into—the primitive instinct !’

He laughed, and kissed her again, declaring that the primitive instinct was a sufficiently comprehensive fact to satisfy him. Then a breath brought about another transition. Dorothea laughed, too. She had a story to tell him about the Oxford Don, Everard Cleeve ; and that led on to Lady Tregellis, and to Mr. Cleeve’s declared readiness to throw up any engagement for the sake of meeting Gavan Sarel. So they drifted on in the homely familiarity of clasped hands and everyday converse : to talk about the actions, thoughts, feelings of the week : scrappy confidences on his part as to his doings and political interests—he was not a man of many words, even to her—also to the news of an unlooked-for excitement at Westminster, the event of the hour and the cause of his lateness. Eustace Olver, Radical member and editor of the *Torch*, had been suspended for declaring that he did not believe the word of the Prime Minister, and refusing to withdraw and apologize. And then he told her of a speech he (Sarel) had made that evening which had been unexpected, and had, perhaps for that reason, taken the House. She exulted, asking various questions.

‘Don’t tell me that it was unpremeditated. Do you ever make an effect which you have not fully calculated ?’

‘Never, without regretting it.’

‘Ah, have you ever in your life done anything on a spontaneous impulse ?’

‘I have loved you,’ he replied.

‘And regretted it ?’

His answer was a caress.

‘I wonder whether, if you had married me on an impulse—supposing that possible—you would have repented it ?’

'Probably,' he said lightly. 'Marriage is a malady under which our civilization groans. I have never wanted to put myself into the way of contracting it.'

He waited, as though expecting her to laugh or to answer in the same strain. They had discussed the subject so freely at times, and were, he thought, so well in accord upon it, that it did not occur to him he might have hurt her. He knew nothing of that letter from Baziria lying in the locked drawer of Dorothea's writing-table, which she had intended to show him this evening.

'Besides,' he added, 'it never was possible, though I suppose we should have married if fate had not emancipated us from the elementary conditions. As it is, we have found a more excellent way.'

'That sounds a curious sentiment,' she said bitterly, 'from the advocate of moral purity.'

'Not at all. I live up to my doctrines, short of inscribing the fact on the parish register. That's the only difference.'

Dorothea thought of the letter she was going to show him.

What would he feel about it? Would he welcome it as a means of regularizing the position and doing away with these clandestine meetings, which he was evidently beginning to find inconvenient? Or would he regard it as a disagreeable reminder of claims he would prefer to disavow?

The doubt crept in and blurred her vague dream of happiness. She played with it, leading the talk to certain unconventional relationships—matter of common gossip in her circle—in course of which the death of either husband or wife had offered a chance, eagerly seized, for a legitimate if somewhat supererogatory consummation. Had the experiment proved satisfactory? She mentioned cases.

'It's a queer phase of human nature,' he said, 'that

desire—when there's nothing to be gained by it—for a bourgeois sort of respectability. No, those things never answer.'

Half frightened, she pressed him cunningly.

'I too,' she said, 'have asked myself whether such a marriage might not prove the destruction of a dear illusion.'

He did not speak.

'For instance,' she went on bravely, 'in the case of you and me, it would be wiser probably, should such a condition ever arise, not to end our days in the same dwelling.'

'Certainly, a little house in the next street for one of us might be preferable,' he answered. 'But why, Thea, should you talk like this?'

A sudden desire seized her to test him. She resolved not to show him that letter.

'I am considering the question. Women, you know, have their fits of sentimental curiosity. You think that marriage destroys the poetry of life?'

'I think it is apt to affect unpleasantly the prose of life. I don't know much about poetry. I never read poetry. But marriage pretty nearly always goes against a public man's career——' He paused, and added, 'Unless——' and paused again.

'Unless?' she questioned. 'Were you going to say unless there's a true affinity, a complete oneness of aims and sympathies?'

'No, I wasn't going to say that. It's my theory that such an affinity is quite irreconcilable with the marriage bond. Numa had to look afield for his Egeria. I'm not great on classical allusions, and I'm quoting Eustace Olver twitting the Prime Minister this evening about his alliance with me. *I'm* the Egeria who has abandoned her votary. Seems rather a mixed metaphor.'

'Never mind that!' cried Dorothea. 'I want to know what follows the "unless."'

'I was going to say, unless there's a tremendously big worldly balance—money, suppose, on one side, power that's bought with it on the other.'

'And an Egeria in the grove,' she added in a low voice.

'No,' he answered energetically, throwing back the gray lock with a determined movement of his head, while the mask of his face stiffened. 'That wouldn't be my idea at all. If there ever had been an Egeria, she should keep in her grove and melt away into her fountain.'

'I see. You believe in doing marriage thoroughly, if a man does it at all?'

'I believe in a man being thoroughly true to his own interests, whether he is serving God or Mammon.'

Sarel spoke slowly, looking away from Dorothea's face, though his firm cool hand did not cease from its caressing touch up and down the backs of her fingers.

'It's purely a matter of will-power,' he went on. 'A man can always make himself love a woman if he chooses. That's where primitive instinct comes in. As for sympathy and affinity and the rest, he is best without all that. A man who has got to follow his star is wisest to do so unhampered by upsetting emotions. If Napoleon hadn't wrecked himself on woman, his star wouldn't have set over St. Helena.'

'Or if he had kept faithful to the one woman who watched with him its first directing gleams! I see your personal application, and I'm going to ask you a personal question, to which I want an absolutely truthful answer. Gavan, you have told me many times that I'm all the world to you. What, in point of fact, does that mean?'

'It means what you cannot doubt, that I love you.'

'Does it mean that, if I were free, you would marry me?'

He took away his hand from hers.

‘That is a hard question to answer, Dorothea.’

‘It ought not to be so hard. Why?’

‘Because I should have first to decide which I cared for most—you, or what has always been the great object of my life.’

‘And that is—tell me.’

‘You know it well enough. We have often talked of where my star might lead me.’

‘In other words, your object is power. You want to rule.’

‘If you put it so. To me my career has always seemed in a manner fate-directed, and its objects outside myself.’

‘And you call yourself a man without poetic feeling, without artistic instinct, without religion!’ she exclaimed.

‘At any rate, you have one thing strong in you—that is, superstition.’

‘It may be so. Isn’t there a saying, “Where there’s no God, there are ghosts?” I am a Celt. I admit that I have certain superstitions; they have made me so far what I am. From my boyhood I have felt that I had a mission, that I was destined to be a leader of men. The time will come when I shall be Dictator of England. Don’t imagine, dear Egeria, that I am plotting high treason. A Prime Minister who grips the reins firmly may drive the chariot of the State a long way on the road to liberty.’

He spoke now in the voice of the fanatic, his eyes abstracted and darkly brilliant. She knew the mood; she had seen it before, though on very rare occasions. At such moments she was apt to remember with a little thrill of dread that his grandfather had committed suicide in a fit of temporary insanity. Yet in most respects Sarel was splendidly healthy. And why should not he believe in his mission? No man was ever great who did not believe in himself, and

from all time, there had been men marked out by Fate for greatness who were themselves overpoweringly conscious of the fact. Why, because this was London at the end of the nineteenth century, should there be no possibility of a new Cæsar? There was nothing that might not happen. Had she not already herself had some experience of signs and wonders? And the soul of the priestess seemed to thrill in her again, and the ache of that old passion to gnaw her anew.

'But I *will* have my answer!' she cried. 'You shall not put me off with vague talk about your star and destiny. Tell me the truth, the true truth, the absolute truth, the brutal truth! I'm never afraid of the truth. . . . Acknowledge that you have never loved me as a man loves the one woman he'd choose before all the world to share his fortunes, to live in his house, to bear his name, and be the mother of his children. Say—if it's true—that you have never loved me in that way. Say—if it's true—that you have never loved me as your wife.'

He tightened his lips and seemed to reflect. Then he said deliberately:

'No—if I must tell the absolute truth—I don't think I have loved you *quite* like that.'

'Not even'—her voice, in the intensity of its reproach, became a wail—'Oh! have you *never* thought of me as your wife?'

'I don't know; I cannot tell. There are moments when the one woman becomes to a man himself and the universe.'

'But the fact remains'—she spoke now in a hard voice and collectedly—'the fact remains, speaking in cold blood, that, if I were free, you would not care to marry me?'

'No. As I said, I look upon marriage for a public man, except under very exceptional advantages, as a great mistake.'

She drew her hand from his, not with any demonstration of feeling, but gently, and moved a little away, back into the further corner of the divan.

‘Thank you, dear,’ she said. ‘I like to know just what I’ve been to you these seven years—your—Egeria—not your wife!’

‘You’ve been the only woman in the world, except my mother, that I’ve ever loved.’

‘That’s better. I’m glad you name me in the same breath with her. It seems to restore my self-respect. I’ve got a place in your life, anyhow, which should be a satisfaction. But now the future is shaping itself out before you, and I’d like to be sure where I come into the scheme, even if I’m only to be a decorative note, as Alaric would say.’

‘Oh, your son—is he here yet?’

‘He arrived this evening. But we’ll leave him out. Just now I would rather talk about the difference in your feeling for me.’

‘There’s nothing different in my feeling for you.’

‘Well, you are not Prime Minister yet, and there seems to be no question of my being your wife. But if there were—it’s my whim for the moment to argue things out—why shouldn’t I be the wife of a Prime Minister of England?’

She laughed hysterically, for she had in her mind that other man who might so soon be Prime Minister, and who a few hours ago had laid humbly at her feet all that this man was so contemptuously denying her.

‘What is there against me?’ she went on. ‘I’m not ill-born. I’m a great artist—so they say. I am a virtuous woman—so they say. I’ve had some political training, and I have social tact, and a few highly-placed friends. True, I am no longer young; but neither are you. And I am not ugly—so they say. Where is the objection?’

‘The objection? Do you really wish to know it—apart

from the fact that every acre I own is mortgaged, and that I haven't means to meet the expenses of the next election? Well, it's not complicated.'

'Let me hear it.'

'The objection is that you are Dorothea Queste, that you have been my—Egeria for seven years, and that I've been fool enough to write you love-letters, which have been stolen.'

'Stolen!' She started up. 'Great heavens! what are you telling me?'

'A few days ago,' he said, 'I received a communication from an anonymous correspondent, who stated that he was in possession of certain letters written by me which, if made public, would ruin my career as a statesman.'

'What did the man mean?'

'Blackmail. That is the only interpretation that I could put on the letter. I have heard nothing since. As a proof of authenticity, photographs were enclosed of a page of two of the letters.'

'And they were genuine?'

'One was a letter I had written to you about eighteen months ago.'

'Compromising?'

'I am afraid a British jury would consider it distinctly compromising, if it were read aloud in the Divorce Court.'

She gave her shoulders a shake.

'It is horrible! But that is not a danger.'

'Unfortunately, the other letter compromises me politically.'

'Politically?'

'You remember the Hagan Magrath episode?'

'Yes. I have always felt that you were imprudent. It was dangerous to coquet with that man.'

'I was a free-lance then, the gladiator of the House. But you are quite right—I acted imprudently. All

players make mistakes, and they generally happen at the beginning of the game. This would not be so serious were there not a question of my becoming a Minister of State.'

'What have you done in the matter?' she asked.

'Nothing. I await developments. It puzzles me how the blackmailer can have got possession of the documents. Hagan Magrath may be a Fenian, but he is incapable of making such use of a private letter.'

She was silent, her mind working to no result.

'Of course,' he said, 'the letter was stolen. Possibly Hagan Magrath is not aware of the theft. There's no use in speculating about that. But the other letter—yours—is a different business. The deuce of it is that the letter in its phraseology is so very effusive. I can't conceive how I came to let myself out like that on paper; it's not my style. I must have been in the famished-beast condition. Never mind: don't worry over it. Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you. One reason why I have done so is that it suggests treachery close at hand. Have you any idea who could have had access to your private papers?'

She sought her memory distressfully.

'I always lock your letters away carefully. They are in that bureau. I carry the key on my watch-chain. My servants are above suspicion, and no one else is ever alone in the studio.'

'Your secretary? Sebastian Blythe was once your secretary, was he not?'

'How you harp on that man! He is a gentleman.'

'So everybody says,' observed Sarel, with a touch of Augustus Charafta's dry manner when he had made the same remark. 'Thea, you are a strange mixture. To the brain of a man and the courage of a lion you add a woman's worst sentimentalities. How often have I asked you to destroy my letters!'

'If I am not afraid of being compromised,' she retorted, 'why should you care?'

'Well, we won't argue the point. All this bears out my theory that Egerias to public men, even when they are counsellors to a Prime Minister, should be avoided. Now I must go. Daylight will be upon us if I stay much longer, and you will be worn out for work and play to-morrow.'

He bade her good-night—a sufficiently tender good-night—but she was unresponsive. As he was leaving her, she said :

'There's one thing that happened at the House of Commons yesterday which you have not told me.'

He waited, as if reflecting upon what the omission had been.

'I think,' he said, 'that I have told you everything of importance.'

'No, for perhaps this may turn out more important than anything else which has happened to you—your introduction to Miss Aldenning.'

He seemed surprised.

'From whom did you hear of that?'

'From everyone, it seems to me, who has been here to-day—Lady Tregellis, Mary de Burgh, Sebastian Blythe, and Lord Ravage.'

'Lord Ravage was presented also.'

—'Yes, I know about that. I know that this beautiful young lady, who is a sort of savage, I understand, had two wishes close to her heart, and so easily gratified! Ah, if all our hearts' wishes could be so easily gratified! She wished to meet Lord Ravage, and more ardently still Gavan Sarel.'

'I don't know about the "more ardently," or why I should rank higher in Miss Aldenning's estimation than so distinguished a person as Lord Ravage.'

‘Because you are Gavan Sarel, who has never before been at any young woman’s beck and call.’

‘I am not now at any woman’s beck and call, unless it be at yours.’

‘No, my friend, you have shown me my position. Alas! I have no fetters with which to bind Gavan Sarel. Miss Kaia Aldenning, it appears, has golden chains and ropes of pearls. Well, perhaps I ought to thank you for your candour. Did you mean it to be a preparation?’

‘A preparation for what?’

‘For the inevitable. You spoke just now of exceptional conditions under which a public man might contemplate marriage. It would seem, from all accounts, that this young woman fulfils those conditions.’

‘Good-night,’ he said shortly, leaving the half-accusation unanswered.

He put on his overcoat, and made for the door, but the tapestry had not dropped behind him, when her cry called him back.

‘Gavan!’ They met midway; she flung her arms about him. ‘Oh, don’t kill me, Gavan!’ she moaned. ‘Oh, don’t kill me! I cannot live without you!’

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As Sarel let himself out into the side-court, Alaric Queste, passing along the Embankment to the ordinary entrance, halted, seeing a man’s figure emerge from the shadow of the tree overhanging the models’ door.

He was sure that he had heard the crunch of the lock and the slow falling-to of a heavy door closed cautiously. Then he saw the powerful form of a tall man who wore his hat tilted over his brows, and the fur collar of his overcoat raised to conceal the lower part of his face, marching, as soon as he gained the open, with a swinging, unconscious step that reminded Alaric of walking-matches

he had seen and athletic sports at which he had assisted. Perhaps it was the tilted hat that, in an incongruous association, suggested the House of Commons. Alaric was keenly observant; very little missed him, as he was wont himself to remark. He decided that the man was not a burglar, and his first mental question was, What could such a person, if he wasn't a burglar, be doing at the model's entrance to his mother's studio? Alaric passed in front of the other door—he had gone on unconsciously—but by that time the figure was lost in the darkness. Alaric went round and tried the studio door. Finding it firm and fast, and no noise within or sign betokening an unlawful intruder, he then told himself he must have made a mistake, and that probably there was another house behind which had a back-entrance from this piece of waste land with the trees upon it. Only he could remember none such. Perhaps the man had been a dissipated inhabitant of the mews, but it was impressed upon Alaric that the figure he had seen was not that of either burglar or stableman. It had about it something far too distinctive, if not distinguished.

Alaric lost no more time in useless conjecture, but let himself in with his latch-key, and went upstairs, stumbling over what seemed a wadded bundle upon the first landing.

'That you, Matsu?'

The wadded bundle arose, revealing a little yellow Japanese man wrapped in a blue night-kimono with a futon, or quilted cotton blanket, trailing behind him, who ducked in obeisance.

'Yes, sah.'

'Didn't they find you a cupboard to sleep in, Mats? They said they were going to.'

'Yes, sah.'

'Then you'd better pack yourself into it, Mats, and carry your bed along with you. Needn't sit up for me

another time. We're not in Port Said now, and there's no fear of my being knifed by an Arab thief.'

The Japanese boy gathered up his wadded futons, first making another obeisance, but did not go away.

Before entering his own room, Alaric paused for a moment at a closed door and listened. It was his mother's door, and he told himself she must be asleep, which seemed to him strange, remembering the thoughtless noise he had made talking to Matsu, and what a nervous, restless creature she was. An idea struck him. He went down a short flight leading from the upper landing to the studio door, and, trying that, found it also locked. His first fancy about burglars returned to him, and he could not help connecting this locked door with the man he had seen, as he fancied, leaving by the models' entrance.

He listened, fumbling at the handle, which he remembered was a stupid thing to do.

He listened again, and seemed to hear queer stifled sounds within. They were not sounds such as one might have expected a burglar to make, but more like the deep in-drawn gasps of a soul in mortal agony. Thoroughly alarmed, Alaric tried to force the door. Then a voice inside spoke. He hardly recognised it for his mother's voice.

'Wait, please. Is that you, Ral?'

'Yes, it's I,' he answered. 'What is the matter?'

He must have waited nearly five minutes before the answer came. It sounded nearer the door.

'Nothing is the matter. Go to bed, boy, and don't mind me.'

'But I do mind you. You are not ill, are you? It sounded like it.'

'No, I've been—I fell asleep.'

'You weren't asleep then. It sounded like crying. Open the door, and let me satisfy myself that you are all right.'

There was a slow grinding of the lock. He thought, too, that he heard the click of the light being turned off. He had only his candle by which to examine her, and she seemed to shrink from observation, holding her hands up to shield her eyes. He saw that she was wearing the dress in which he had left her. His observant glance flashed round the studio. The fire was shedding a dull glow, and the cushions of the divan, showing the indent of her head, bore out what she had said about having been asleep.

'Has anyone been here?' he asked.

'No—yes; you left Lord Ravage.'

'I didn't mean that; but as I was coming in, I made sure that I saw a man going out by the models' door—a big man, with a tall hat and fur overcoat. It gave me a notion that there might be burglars here.'

Dorothea laughed shrilly.

'Burglars don't wear tall hats and fur-lined overcoats, or let themselves out with a latch-key. I've been in this room since you left. Good-night, Ral. Was it a good night at the Roscius?'

'Pretty fair. I met the *Thunderer's* man—Blake, the art critic, you know—and started him on my exhibition. What's that by the fireplace? Somebody has left his glove.'

It was a man's doeskin glove. Alaric picked it up and smoothed it out.

'Who's the owner of this pretty thing? Too big for Lord Ravage, and don't look like a Guardsman's property somehow. You said you had had some smart men, didn't you, in attendance on Lady Rosalys and Miss Tolvean?'

He tossed the glove into an open work-basket, adding:

'I never said the burglar let himself out with a latch-key. The idea didn't occur.'

Dorothea laughed again. Alaric took her hand and led her into the corridor.

‘You’ve been overdoing it. You sound hysterical. If you go on like this, entertaining and working all day and sitting up all night, I shan’t be able to boast any more of my young and beautiful mother.’

He pushed her into her room, kissing her good-night and shutting the door upon her, as though she had been a naughty child. Dorothea stood like a statue in the middle of the room till his steps had ceased and all was silent in the house again; then once more the paroxysm seized her, and she flung herself upon the bed, literally gnawing the pillows to stifle the noise of her sobs.

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It was close on luncheon-time the next day when Alaric came into his mother’s studio with a bundle of gay-hued kimonos on his arm, and Matsu behind, carrying a collection of small wooden boxes, which contained specimens of cloisonné, Satsuma, carved ivory, and various odds and ends that he had picked up in his Japanese wanderings. So engrossed, indeed, had Alaric been all the morning over the unpacking of his embroideries and in working out the divers plans for securing future eminence which had been darting through his active brain, that he had forgotten his midnight alarms—the locked door, the mysterious figure, and the hysterical outburst of which he had suspected his mother.

There was nothing in Dorothea’s face or manner to remind him of these things. Notwithstanding her agitating vigil, she had the well-tubbed look of freshness, that morning glory, which is a peculiarity of certain Englishwomen, but which in her case suggested the triumph of the disciplined mind rather than that of the well-tended body—the lustre of the keenly-tempered blade shining through a somewhat fragile sheath. Her late emotion had spiritualized her pallor, and given a more limpid clearness to her eyes; but except for this she was her

usual cheerful working self, clad in her studio apron, which in the eyes of many of her admirers was the garb that became her best. She painted on, holding her palette and sheaf of brushes against her left shoulder. Now and then she would move back a pace or two, to view the effect of her last touches, chatting the while in her half-frivolous, half-grave fashion with the sitter, Miss Tolvean.

At Alaric's entrance, however, the sitting came to an end. Miss Tolvean, attracted by the kimonos, jumped off the platform and begged to be allowed to put one on, and then the conversation grew animated and complimentary. Miss Tolvean was not particularly clever, but she was very good to look at, and said commonplace things just in the right way and with the most charming accent. Alaric amused her. She said he was 'so quaint,' like his mother, and that her aunt, Lady Tregellis, would delight in him. Dorothea was pleased to see that the quaintness made a distinctly good impression, and that Miss Tolvean seemed quite prepared to admit Alaric into her exclusive little world. Not that Lady Tregellis was exclusive, her niece explained frankly, when challenged by Alaric on the point. Nobody, Miss Tolvean said, could call Aunt Julia exclusive; she was eclectic—wasn't that the word?—which was ever so much nicer. Then Miss Tolvean began to plan a kimono tea, only Mr. Queste must lend them Matsu—how did he spell him? It sounded like door-mats. If but a Japanese garment could be found hideous enough to tempt Aunt Julia to array herself in costume, the result would be too delightful! Aunt Julia, she also frankly explained, was considered the most eccentrically-dressed old lady in London, and it was just a mercy that she didn't insist on coming out in crinoline, her taste inclining mainly to the fashion of the fifties. At private views, related the niece, a crowd of

lady journalists always clustered round Aunt Julia and took notes of her apparel, which made them good copy. Miss Tolvean finally picked out a black satin actor's dress embroidered in gold dragons, which she was sure would seize Lady Tregellis' fancy, and which, she said, Alaric must certainly show her aunt on Sunday.

Then Dorothea gave Miss Tolvean the information, which she begged might be conveyed to Lady Tregellis, that she had secured that not too difficult person, Sebastian Blythe, for Sunday.

'Oh yes, we know,' said Miss Tolvean; 'he was at the Olvers' last night. We arrived at the same time, very late, quite at the end—just in time for Rovighi's last song, and for the actors and actresses and the riff-raff from the House, who went there to enjoy themselves, and not just to put an appearance for the sake of propitiating the *Torch*, like the others. The smart people had all gone—that's what Aunt Julia likes at the Olvers'. Then she pumps the Radicals, and gets boxes and stalls offered her by the managers, and does little bits of business generally. She did a lot of business last night—among other things, made Eustace Olver introduce Mr. Blythe, and started him straight away on the Reminiscences, so that we needn't have bothered you after all, dear Thea. . . . And now may someone order me a cab?'

But just then—Matsu had disappeared when Alaric called him—there sounded the most wonderful and melodious reverberation, thrilling, swelling, and diminuendoing in such music that Dorothea gave her son a joyous and grateful smile of recognition, and Miss Tolvean cried:

'Is it a gong? Oh, what a beauty!'

'The finest in Europe,' gravely assented Ral; 'Matsu is an authority. His father is a worker in bronze. "That very number one temple gong," said Matsu, when he espied it in a backyard, covered with verdigris, on a dealer's

premises at Kioto. He snatched it up, he cleaned it, he played upon it—you hear him.'

'He summons our guests,' said Dorothea, putting her arm within that of the young girl. 'No cab just yet, my dear. Is the gong a present to me, Ral?'

'No, Doda,' replied Ral sweetly, but with decision; 'it's a present to myself—for the summoning of *my* guests in *my* new abode.'

Dorothea gave him a startled look, and paled. Thus the old birds learn that the young ones contemplate settling in a nest of their own. It was her first intimation of the fact. Ral continued dramatically, with a hint of melancholy in his voice, as Miss Tolvean said in ecstatic interest:

'Oh, may I be one? Will you ask Aunt Julia and me to dine with you in your new Abode, Mr. Queste?'

'There will be nothing to dine upon, not for a long while, at least—nothing but the gong, and the Joy, and the Abode. You see, I've got to decorate the Abode, Miss Tolvean—it's a vermilion and orange scheme that I thought out in Japan. Oh, you'll like it. When you people all see it, every one of you will be wanting your houses decorated according to that scheme; and if I make myself into a joint-stock company for the introduction of Eastern methods into European house-furnishing, why, then it's just possible that I might be able to afford to dine. At present, even if I sell all my pictures, there's no chance of it. Still, what does that matter?' continued Alaric loftily. 'It is of no consequence *what* one eats when one has created a beautiful Abode to eat it in.'

'We might make a surprise party, as they do in America,' said Miss Tolvean, when they had sat down to luncheon, 'and bring our food with us.'

'Oh, do you think that people like surprises in these days?' said Alaric. 'There are too many of them.'

Everybody is surprised. Surprise is common. No, the true joy is to be found in simplicity. Now, my idea about dinner—after the gong had sounded—would be superb simplicity. Sardines, say, and bread-and-butter, and beer in perfectly-shaped glasses—that would be nice, don't you think?—or cider, or lemons. Wine, which is so beautiful, would be out of the question.'

Alaric sighed.

'I once had some wonderful wine which I bought at a sale. I meant to lay it down and drink it when the Abode was created. I paid three shillings a bottle for it. But directly I had bought it a fellow offered me double. That made me reflect. I said to myself, "A poor artist ought not to drink wine at six shillings a bottle," and so I let him have the lot.'

'I think I should have kept it,' said Miss Tolvean.

'No, you wouldn't, not if you had been a poor artist. It's difficult for us to keep anything—except our reputations. We can do that sometimes.'

'With difficulty,' put in Dorothea, giving her tinkling little laugh; and Alaric responded mournfully:

'Yes, there *is* a difficulty. But one might do something decorative with lemons,' he added more hopefully. 'I'd encourage lemons.'

'Go in for blue-ribbon guests,' suggested Miss Tolvean, allowing him to pour her out some Chianti.

Dorothea was mixing a salad. As he chattered, Alaric cast furtive glances at his mother's lowered face.

'Oh no,' he said; 'I couldn't have anything blue in the Abode; it wouldn't go with the orange and vermilion scheme.'

Dorothea had finished mixing her salad. She looked her son straight in the eyes. They understood each other, these two.

'Where do you intend to build your new house, Ral?' she asked.

'It is built,' he answered promptly. 'I am only going to fix it up. It's Phil Brent's house. I helped him to design it. He's the Impressionist painter, Miss Tolvean. Impressionism won't run the Abode. He sells it to me.'

'On mortgage,' said Dorothea. 'An artistic gamble! The Home against the Exhibition.'

'How you see into things, Doda! Oh, you've no idea what a woman of business my mother is, Miss Tolvean. Not quite a gamble, dear. It was through Jessup of Shanghai I managed it. Did you ever hear of Jessup of Shanghai?'

Both ladies professed ignorance.

'Phil Brent was out in Shanghai impressionizing,' said Alaric. 'That's where we made the deal. I looked ahead and saw my future dimly looming. I also saw an opportunity. I seized the opportunity, which was Jessup. Oh, if you ever want to do anything with money in the East, you should know Jessup of Shanghai. He's everything in the financial line out there—a regular one-man show. Runs the whole Chinese business. Floats millions. He floated me—for something more modest than a million.'

Dorothea looked at Alaric again. He was in earnest; he had a purpose. She did not quite grasp the purpose; she only grasped that he did not mean to act the part of showman to her show; he meant to run a show of his own, and if possible to eclipse hers.

'You'd be absolutely safe from Singapore to San Francisco franked by Jessup's card,' cheerfully pursued Alaric. 'He let me talk to him; liked my scheme; pulled out his card; scribbled two lines on it. "Might be of use," he said. Well, it was of use—just. For one thing, my money got lost—dodged round to Yokohama instead of landing at Hong Kong. I went to the bank;

took Jessup of Shanghai's card and showed it to them. "How much do you want?" said the manager. "Any amount you like—in notes or gold." "But your confidence in me bewilders me," I said. "You don't know me." "No; but we know Jessup of Shanghai's card," said they. And then I realized that I might raise a pile if I wanted and bolt. Seemed a pity. It set me thinking. Next time I saw Jessup I told him what I'd been thinking—frankly laid myself open. There's nothing like simplicity; all true art is simple. People won't see it. They go footling round and being fussy and important and making grabs—the Impressionist business, fishing for a sky-tone and bringing up muddy green. That's what I told Phil Brent. If he'd only been simple with Jessup, all the bosses in the East would have bought his sketches, and I shouldn't have bought his Home. But Phil doesn't like simplicity—says it's crude. Doda, wasn't there some old sage who advised one always to tell a lie if you wanted people to think you were speaking the truth?"

Alaric rattled on. He next dramatized Matsu, and was anecdotal on the subject of Eastern curiosity-vendors. Miss Tolvean was much amused. It was three o'clock before her hansom was called at last, and mother and son were alone.

While the two young people chatted over the curios after luncheon, Dorothea had not been idle. With her, few of the hours of light were wasted, and she certainly deserved well of her profession, if industry could command its favours. The portrait had received some apt criticisms from Alaric—who, as Dorothea proudly admitted, was no mean artist—and some fresh touches from her brush. Then she had removed to a large recessed nook in the studio—an excrescent room, in fact, built on after the studio had been finished, when the success of those exquisite and fantastic dry-points, for which she was now

more famous than as a portrait-painter, had necessitated a special workroom. This room had a window of its own, set cornerwise, and shaded by tilted screens of tracing-paper, and was filled up all along the walls with shelves and drawers, holding stacks of paper and copper-plates and etching implements generally. There were queer arrangements of electric light for dull days, and beneath the window was a plain deal dresser. Here Dorothea now occupied herself, sketching in upon the copper the first one she had begun of the illustrations for that *édition de luxe* of Ravage's book of which she had spoken to Augustus Charafta. Alaric looked over her shoulder when he returned from putting Miss Tolvean into the cab. He was silent for more than a minute, and she knew that he was examining and appraising the original study from which she was drawing. When he spoke, however, it was to make a technical remark.

'A hundred impressions! I should doubt that delicate burr standing so many. You can hardly dare to take a proof till you send the plate to be steel-faced.'

'I don't dare, though I long to,' she replied. 'Yes, I can count upon a hundred impressions after the steel-facing, not more.' She went on manipulating her diamond-pointed etching-needle with a skill and precision which called forth an admiring comment from her son. 'And you say I can't draw!' she cried triumphantly.

'A prophetess is not without honour, save among her own children,' paraphrased he. 'I never dreamed of making so impertinent and presumptuous an accusation. All I have ventured to say is what I myself have learned from painful failures. You, who have genius, didn't make the painful failures, so are not in a position to grasp the truth that one can't do too much line-work from the start.'

'I had to earn my living from the start,' she answered,

‘and one can’t do that on line-work. Alaric, I want to speak to you.’ She carefully laid away her etching-needle and scraper, and covered the plate, then led him along to the more inhabited part of the studio. ‘Ral, is it true that you mean to set up for yourself?’

‘Yes, mother.’

There was a pause. Under control as she was, Dorothea showed that he had pained her. He went on in self-exculpatory eagerness:

‘I’ve got the planetary impulse in me, and I can’t be a satellite. I must travel in my own orbit. If I remained here, living in your house, and identified with you as your son, I should be a mere satellite shining in the borrowed light of my mother’s glory.’

She said nothing. After a minute he asked:

‘What do you think?’

‘I think,’ she said slowly, ‘that you might have told me about your purchase of Phil Brent’s house at a more suitable moment.’

‘Oh, that! I don’t take count of the psychological moment; this seemed the moment to me. It’s always the suitable moment when the mood prompts. Yes, I’ve bought the house—got it a bargain—and I mean to make something out of it that all London will talk about. You’ll come, Doda, and see it soon? But I’ve got my own scheme for that, too; it mustn’t be a copy of your decorative effects. As soon as my exhibition is over, and my cases have arrived from the East, I shall set to work to establish myself after my own fashion. I’m going to play a bold game—don’t you see, dear? And if the work is only strong enough to carry me through, I shall make my way to the front, and the world shall hail me both as artist and man.’

‘As man!’ she repeated.

‘Why, of course. I suppose it’s hard for a mother to

recognise the fact that her son has an individuality which is not hers—that he is no longer a baby in petticoats to be told Bible stories and given lollipops, or a youngster in Eton jackets and collars to be taken to the pantomime in the holidays! It oughtn't to be so hard for you, though, Doda,' he went on. 'There's not been much of the ordinary maternal flummery in your methods. You haven't crammed me with nursery theology, and tucked me up of nights, and come the virtuous parent over me generally.'

'No, Ral; I've often thought how wrong it was of me. I never even taught you your Catechism.'

'Because you couldn't say it yourself,' laughed he. 'Never mind; you taught me one gospel, and the best there is—the Gospel of Work; and you've preached me another, and set me an example of it—the Gospel of Independence—which is now bearing fruit. I take it those two gospels are good enough for fitting a man to make his way in the world—as good, anyhow, as Watts's hymns and the duty to one's neighbour.'

'I'm a Pagan, Ral, and I've made you one.'

'You've made a pal of me, which is better than a Pagan. Oh no! you've never been a story-book mother, you proud, queer, hard-working human thing! We've been just pals, enjoying our larks and pranks together, and giving each other a hand in our bad times, and never losing a bit of fun for want of stooping to pick it up. And that's the way it must be always with us two, Doda, though I am going to remove my goods and chattels—the gong included—and to set up an opposition shop. Now—now, *please*, dear, we won't be sentimental over it. I really did the emotional act thoroughly last night. I couldn't pump up any more romance—not if it was ever so much so.'

She looked up at him, and laughed in a wild, quavering way, her eyes blinking to hide the rising tears.

For there had come a strange softening and unsealing of heart and memory in Dorothea. Her face quivered, and but for an immense effort, she must have broken down entirely. Her short married life, and Ral's childhood, boyhood, and opening manhood, came back as he spoke—phase, period, and personality recalled, all seeming now past and dead. She remembered the baby that had clung to her, and bored her, and made her impatient of the hampering burden, in that tragedy of her early womanhood, yet whose touch had been as grips of steel, binding her to the wheel of duty; then the urchin in sailor suits, for whom she had toiled out of her student hours that he might be dainty and well clad; afterwards the schoolboy, for whom she had made greater sacrifices, keeping all the sordid little privations for term-time, and manœuvring the slender gains so that, as he had said, they might have their pranks and larks in the holidays; again, the art student, who had in his very divergence from her own theories become her art companion; and now the grown man, for whose coming she had been making herself ready—who was to have been the master of her house, her joy, her pride, her social adjutant, her compensation for other restrictions and limitations, her saviour, her pillar of support. She had looked forward to this next year or two of his life—until he should marry, she told herself—she had never thought of him as living apart, but had pictured him as the sharer of her success; as relieving her of superfluous commissions—for he was as good a portrait-painter as she herself—and thus affording her greater time for pleasanter work; had thought of him, in fact, as the junior partner in a profitable business in which he should shortly become her coequal. That had been her idea. She had never dreamed of the possibility of his wishing to separate himself from her—of his wanting to have his own house, his own friends; to practise his own methods, social and

artistic, and designedly different from her methods. But all the while this had been in his mind, and he had actually, and without consulting her, bought a house with that intent. There seemed something like rivalry, even like injury, in the whole procedure. She had not expected it.

And then came that passionate longing which women, reaching middle age, experience sometimes—the longing for that which could never return: for vanished youth, for the elementary joy of motherhood, for the helpless, dependent creature once again, whom she had nourished at her bosom, and who had been a part of herself that no man could take from her. She flung her arms up to him in an instinctive movement—this small woman, whose head hardly reached to the neck of the big man—and, clasping her arms about his shoulders, pulled him down with her into an arm-chair, and held him on her knees and against her breast while she murmured over him in a soft, crooning way:

'Oh, Ral, my boy!—my dear, dear boy!'

He was very tender with her, laughing, with a break in his voice, and kissing her back as he disengaged himself.

'Think it over, Doda, and you'll see it's all right, and *has* to be if I'm to do any independent good for myself. And now I'm off. I've got to get an address from Sebastian Blythe, and then to pay an important call. And who do you imagine I'm going to call upon?'

'The Olvers,' she hazarded; 'the editor of the *Thunderer*; some critic person—who?'

'Nothing of the sort. I am going to call on the father of the Arruan Princess. Why, you know, Doda, I never forget a name, and when you were all talking last night, I knew somehow that the name of Aldenning had been impressed upon me, only I couldn't get the focus right; had the flair, but wasn't able to hold my nose to the

scent, which bothered me, for I'm pretty clear in the head as a rule. It was the upset of coming back ; the intoxication of that sense of power ; the *griserie de soi*, which is all a mistake. For a young man who means to boss his own show should never allow his brain to be fuddled even with his own gloriousness. He should keep control over his wires and his puppets. There'll be a nice coil for me to pull about this next month or two—social, political, journalistic, financial. Well, I scent the Aldennings as chief performers in this little act of my play.'

'How have you got to know these people?' she asked.

'I *don't* know them. But you shall hear. Flashed clean into me this morning when Matsu handed me an old telegram that had dropped from the folds of my cummerbund as he dug it out of the tropics portmanteau. Last time I wore that cummerbund was at Singapore—Raffles Hotel—dining-room : punkahs : bleached regimental women—I always recollect pictorially, don't you?—native dealers, and, by the way, I brought you a set of shell curry-spoons to go with the red lacquer dinner-set. Then a telegram was handed me that I couldn't make head or tail of, except that, as I knew it came from Jessup of Shanghai, I knew also that it *must* mean something: "Call Aldenning, if not left Singapore. Have written.—JESSUP, Shanghai." That was it. You see, Jessup of Shanghai is evidently my Eastern Providence—my Western Providence, too, for all I can say. I hadn't a notion who Aldenning was ; concluded any way that he was part of Jessup's scheme, and asked at the office. "Mr. Aldenning sailed in the Messageries boat this morning," they said. "Never waste energy on the impossible" is my motto, and Aldenning for the moment was clearly the impossible, so I took him out of the play-bill. I had to wait in Singapore for the next steamer. If my boat had only been up to time, why, who knows, I might by now have

introduced the Arruan Princess to her future mama-in-law. What do you think of that, Doda, for a decorative scheme? And this time I really *am* off.'

* * * * *

Before she had time to reply he had disappeared, leaving a hurried kiss on wet eyelids. Dorothea laughed to herself. Was ever such a son—a whirlwind, an iceberg, a volcano, a rushing river? No fighting against any of these things. Had he really conceived the audacious project of marrying this Arruan girl—the lady of the pearls and the hidden treasure? That would be quite in accordance with Alaric's methods. And she, at any rate, would not think it so very extraordinary if he were to carry his project through. Dorothea would be fully inclined to back her son, given a fair start, against all the heiress-hunters in London, even against—— Oh! could that be possible? The doubt of last night pricked home, recalling the agony which all those waking hours she had kept under by sheer force of will. Was it possible that her own son could ever be pitted as suitor for a woman's hand against Gavan Sarel?

She drove away the fancy—fought it with the diamond point of her etching-needle, as she bent close over the copper-plate and became absorbed anew in her drawing. Oh! thank Heaven indeed, that she had taught herself, and Alaric, too, the Divine Gospel of Work! Yet her imagination would cling round the image it painted of the beautiful barbarian. Certainly it seemed that Destiny—or Jessup of Shanghai—had decreed the interweaving of her own tangled skein of circumstance with the bright-hued threads of Miss Aldenning's life.

The network of delicate lines on the burnished surface of the copper grew into an etherealized sort of picture. Never had she known a plate start so promisingly. She

went on as long as the daylight lasted, then put on the electric current. It was a recognised rule that on ordinary days she saw no one till six o'clock. Lord Ravage was the one exception. To-day at six precisely, a note was brought her by hand from the House, saying that the debate had taken an unexpected turn, and that he feared he should be unable to keep his appointment. He begged for a line from her by messenger. She scribbled a few words in answer, telling him that she was well, and then worked on till it was time to dress.

She and Ral were dining early and going to a theatre ; afterwards her son was to escort her to a party at the house of an Academician. Sarel she did not expect to see for several days ; he had spoken of political business which might oblige him to leave town. She had resolved with an iron resolution to make him no appeals, to say nothing about her husband's impending death—in fact, to take no definite line of any sort, but to watch developments and let Fate take its course. She told herself grimly that if Sarel needed her help in the furtherance of any negotiation with Lord Ravage he would come to her to ask it. Well, she would wait till he came. She had determined also to let her thoughts dwell upon him as little as possible—a difficult matter, for was he not the undercurrent of her being ? Beneath everything she did and said lay the remembrance of their interview, the stinging sense of humiliation, the practical terror in regard to those stolen letters of which he had told her. She found herself continually speculating upon the suggestion he had made, of Blythe as the thief. She recollected a melodramatic interview she had had with Sebastian before his departure as the *Hemisphere's* special correspondent, in which he had declared his love, and had replied to her bantering rejection of it with threats of vengeance upon an unnamed rival and tragic asseverations of his own undying constancy. She

had been very angry with him, and had dismissed him from her presence, but the next day he had written to her in sincerest penitence, had promised never to again offend in like manner, and had implored her not to cast him off and deprive him of a friendship which had been one of the best influences in his life. Since his return, until the evening before he had not again alluded to his morbid passion, and had taken pains to prove himself her honest friend in every practical way that had presented itself. Apparently he had returned from his travels sane and sensible, and cured of any tendency to such unhealthy ebullitions. Everybody knew that poor Sebastian was a Decadent, and that Fate had treated him with unkindness, and that his emotions were not to be taken seriously. Besides, was he not an English gentleman, born of a good old stock? That he could rifle a woman's desk and use private letters for a dishonourable plan of revenge was surely out of the question. Dorothea put away the idea, preferring the more plausible theory that a French maid whom she had discharged for dishonesty had not confined her depredation to lace, jewellery, and loose cash. In that case, finding nothing was to be gained from Sarel, the woman and her accomplices, if she had any, would no doubt apply to Dorothea herself. And they could be bought. . . . Or, if the worst came to the worst, exposure could be tided over, and—Dorothea's heart gave a mighty bound—as soon as her husband was dead Sarel would marry her privately—he *must* marry her—and the announcement of the marriage would stultify any scandal. Something whispered within her: 'He will be yours yet; a willing captive. Chance will befriend you; be brave, Dorothea.'

She was a woman whose courage leaped to an emergency. She, too, had faith in her destiny, and she had felt from their first meeting that her lot was indissolubly connected with his. Let the Powers bring about that union in their

own fashion. And it nerved her, the sense of playing for high stakes. The stake she risked was Alaric's respect, her dearest possession next to this man's love.

* * * * *

Alaric seated himself at their *tête-à-tête* dinner, elated by the success of his afternoon's mission. He had found Mr. Aldenning at home. The millionaire and his daughter occupied a gorgeous suite in the Hôtel Cecil, but they were looking out for a house, and it had already been suggested that Alaric should assist in making this dwelling an abode of joy and a thing of beauty. The young man's presentiment had been justified: the Aldennings, it was now evident, would take leading parts in his particular little play. They fitted into his map of the immediate future as naturally as the lost piece into a puzzle picture.

Mr. Aldenning was prepared for his visit—had been expecting it, though they had only been in England a week. They had stayed in Paris, he explained, to rig out his daughter. How and why had he heard of Alaric?

This was the puzzle he partially explained. That queer god out of the machine, Jessup of Shanghai, had been working the electric wires. So had Aldenning, which seemed natural enough, seeing that he held large interests in submarine cables. The real mystery lay in the question why Jessup should take so much trouble about an unknown young artist, whom he had met only three times. Alaric could not account for it except on the supposition that Jessup was himself an artist—a financier might be a great artist on his own lines—and that artists are given to do odd things and to take sudden fancies to people they hardly know. There was no doubt that Jessup had been interested and amused in Alaric's frank exposition of his schemes for achieving greatness, and perhaps had impulsively determined to give him a lift in that direction. It

was only an autocratic financier, accustomed to the floating of millions and to disposing of a nation's resources by cablegram, who could dare to act upon his fancies in so impetuous and whimsical a fashion. But where and why did Aldenning come in?

'It's a waste of power to worry over "whys" when a thing is done,' said Alaric, putting an extinguisher on his mother's romantic wonderings. 'I did cast about to see if I could have inadvertently saved Jessup's life the first time we met, but it didn't seem possible in the club smoking-room, where there were no cobras nor assassins nor tidal waves hanging round. How could I know? *He* didn't talk—he made me talk. I concluded I was not boring him, and so I talked. I *did* talk. He said it was a surprise to him to find a man in the East who could be brilliant on the smell of other people's whiskies-and-sodas. I told him that I considered whiskies-and-sodas inartistic—and there was poor old Phil Brent growing careless, missing things, and pouring liqueur brandy down his waistcoat instead of into his mouth. It surprised Jessup when I instanced himself as a man who could be brilliant on the smell of other people's whisky: for he had a long glass in front of him that looked like a peg, only it wasn't alcoholic. That was why old Phil thought he'd got a boon companion. But Jessup was only pretending, in order to get other people to talk: he had his own tippie and a waiter in his pay. There's the true man of the world for you!—he don't drink, he only sips and pretends. I said I'd been observing him. He said a man who observed would get on in the world if he held his tongue likewise. There was a chap there showing what he called spirit photographs. None of them could make head or tail of the things or of the man's story. They all began to tell ghost stories. Jessup told a ghost story. He believes in ghosts. So do I. But those photographs were faked. I gave him technical

reasons. It was then he scribbled on his card, and after that he put me on to that little deal, which ended in my buying Phil Brent's Home, and I never saw or heard of him again till he wired me to call on Aldenning.'

What the terms of Jessup's communication to Aldenning had been, the millionaire did not disclose. Alaric vaguely understood that one potentate had recommended him to another potentate, and that he was to put himself at this potentate's feet; and that he couldn't do better than again frankly unfold his scheme—be simple, in short, which with Alaric meant being extremely subtle. He had been delighted to find that, in regard to the artistic beauty and practical efficacy of simple methods, Mr. Aldenning and he were of one mind. Mr. Aldenning also had a scheme: he, too, was bent upon conquering London: he was in England for a purpose: he wanted to get into Parliament: he wanted his daughter to have every advantage that wealth and influence could give her. He was wrapped up in his daughter: it was Jessup who advised him to bring her to Europe. As for himself, he frankly owned that he was as ignorant of the social ropes as one of his own pearl-divers. A young man, not too big a swell, who did know something about the ropes, and could observe, put two and two together, and report results to his patron, would be of a true service. That had been Jessup's idea. Alaric began now to see before him. To his credit, however, be it said he had raised the Work (with a big W) as an impediment to his undertaking functions more suitable to Sebastian Blythe. He did indeed recommend Sebastian Blythe in the capacity of utility-man. But Mr. Aldenning had heard of Sebastian Blythe. His only friend in London, Patrick O'Leary, M.P., had suggested Blythe, and had introduced him that morning, and Mr. Aldenning hadn't taken to Sebastian Blythe.

Dorothea remembered the Guardsman's quotation from

Eustace Olver of the *Torch*, and asked if the millionaire's manners were as rough as they had been reported, and if he did drop his *h's*.

'And if he does, what does that matter?' cried Alaric in scorn. 'I did not notice whether he did or not. It was of the man himself I was thinking, not of his manners—thinking how great he was, how simple. Of course, he's rough. What else should he be? He was a pearl-diver, and has lived most of his life among pearl-divers and savages. But he's great, all the same. A sort of Berserker hero, a Red Eric. Oh! you'd delight in his beard: it's a glory, a flaming fire, as Sebastian said. And his eyes blue as the sea, and his voice like a saga. He doesn't talk much. That's how he'll go down in London. A huge, silent Norseman—he told me he was Norse, and that his father had been a fisherman.'

'All this sounds extremely interesting,' said Dorothea. 'And his daughter—did you see her?'

'Yes, I saw her.' In a moment Alaric had become tongue-tied; he stammered, he reddened. 'I saw her,' he repeated.

'And what is she like?'

'She's like—she's like nothing—like nobody I've ever seen before.'

'Is she really as beautiful as they say?'

'I don't know whether she's beautiful or not,' replied Alaric, 'but I do know that I wanted to fall down and worship her.'

'Already, Ral! So you are in love at last?'

'Do you call that being in love? It seems to me more like what you've often talked to me about—the finding of my soul. One must have a soul in order to worship a divinity.'

'Was the divinity kind?' asked Dorothea. 'Did you say much to each other?'

‘Not one word. I met her in the corridor. She had just come in. I was going away. I took off my hat, because I knew it must be she. I didn’t need the rope of pearls to tell me. And she smiled and looked at me. Two dark curtains lifted, and a pair of stars shone out. There can never have been such eyes since the world began. Now I begin to understand what you call the hidden meanings of Nature. All the earth and the heavens, sea, sky, moon, and sun were in her eyes, and yet they are dark as night. They’re Nature itself. And when I think of those eyes, I feel that my theories are entirely wrong, and that there’s a depth, a subtlety, a mystery, in life and art that I’ve never begun to understand. Is that being in love, Doda?’

‘It sounds very like it, Ral.’

‘Then I’m in love,’ promptly decided Alaric.

INTERLUDE

THOUGH Mr. Aldenning declared himself as having been not altogether favourably impressed by Sebastian Blythe, the Irish member O'Leary had contrived a kind of arrangement between them—an arrangement by which Mr. Blythe undertook to interest a certain great lady in Kaia's social future, and to bring about an introduction between the two as speedily as might be compatible with the great lady's engagements. This was not difficult. Mr. O'Leary had, before the meeting at the Hôtel Cecil, talked things over with Sebastian, who had in his turn sounded Lady Tregellis at the Olvers' party. Lady Tregellis had taken not unkindly to the suggestion, and Eustace Olver had helped on matters by gently hinting that favourable opportunities for investing in the Great New Guinea Concession Scheme, to establish which Aldenning had come over to Europe, would follow as a matter of course upon the introduction. Eustace explained also that there was a relation between the Scheme and the millionaire's ambition to get into Parliament. For the House of Commons, Mr. Aldenning shrewdly foresaw, would be his most effective basis of operations, and a member of the House of Commons he had therefore resolved to make himself. Colonial—nay, Imperial—interests, Mr. Olver went on, were involved in the more private enterprise. Aldenning was bent upon airing and redressing certain wrongs and grievances in connection with the pearl-fishing industry—grievances and wrongs affecting British

supremacy in the South Seas, and which, in the view of such experts as Jessup of Shanghai, and the big pearling-fleet owner himself, might necessitate a readjustment of Home policy in the East. Mr. Olver informed Lady Tregellis in confidence that he was recounting for her benefit the heads of a leading article he meant to print in the *Torch* upon the subject of Malay complications. His confiding air flattered the old lady, for she liked being, as she put it, at the back of leading articles, even when she didn't understand them. Pearls, she said, appealed to her immensely, but the Home policy in the East was a problem she had never attempted to solve; and as for Malay complications, it would certainly be necessary for her to look in the map to discover where they were likely to exist. Their practical bearing upon the present political situation, Mr. Olver continued, was that the Radical party had awakened to the advantages of gaining a wealthy recruit, and of a vague but high-sounding cry which would thrill the larger patriotism of the masses without seeming to trench upon individual liberties. The party accordingly was considering the question of procuring a seat for Mr. Aldenning. Pat O'Leary thought it highly probable that a Progressivist vacancy might be worked, and had charged himself with the mission of laying the case before Gavan Sarel.

Lady Tregellis was mildly stirred at the prospect of making money over the Concession Scheme, but before committing herself in regard to the young lady, bargained for a meeting at somebody else's house. Now, the Aldennings knew nobody in London but the O'Learys, and the house of the Irish Progressivist naturally presented itself as a diplomatic centre. Patrick O'Leary ventured to suggest a little dinner, and brought up his pretty Australian wife to second the proposal, on which Lady Tregellis was graciously pleased to smile. Besides

a weakness for speculation, the old lady had one for being amused, and she felt pretty sure of amusement at Pat O'Leary's house. There was nothing she liked better than exploring out-of-the-way nooks in Bohemia, and the O'Leary's abode by the Embankment was locally and socially an out-of-the-way nook in comparison with Lowndes Square. Pat and his wife were Bohemians in the most agreeable sense. He was a journalist, a lecturer, had been a violent Home Ruler in the day when Home Rule existed as a cause, and was now a Progressivist, as devoted to Gavan Sarel as he had been to the Uncrowned King of tragic memory. He was an important contributor to the *Torch*, and was known in literary circles as 'P. O. L.,' from the initials above which his articles appeared. Mrs. O'Leary came from the Blue Mountains in Australia, was like some exquisite tropical flower in appearance, and sang with the voice of an angel. She had made quite a sensation when Pat brought her home as his one permanent convert to Home Rule, and was extremely popular in artistic and political drawing-rooms. Although no more moral nor mutually adoring pair could have been found anywhere, the two were exceedingly casual in their ways, and had no respect for persons or places, possessing souls which soared above the minor conventionalities. Thus, if a dinner-party at the O'Learys' was not likely to prove a gastronomical treat, it offered attractions to Lady Tregellis, who did not care in the least how she was fed, so long as the conversation accompanying the repast was well seasoned. There had been a little doubt, however, as to whether a more informal, initiatory entertainment might not be preferable—an accidental-on-purpose meeting in the afternoon—and the question of the dinner-party had not been definitely settled.

All this was explained and discussed at Dorothea's luncheon-party on Sunday, and the compact between

Lady Tregellis and Sebastian Blythe duly ratified. Lady Tregellis was charmed to find Sebastian such a very useful person, so full of tact in this kind of delicate detail—in short, as the old lady expressed it, so completely ‘one of ourselves.’ She deplored the fact that those Radicals, the Olvers and Patrick O’Leary, had been beforehand in grabbing the millionaire, and wondered if something could not yet be done to secure this substantial support for the tottering Government. She had no hesitation in assuring Lord Ravage, who was present, and who entered with graceful humour into the spirit of these machinations, that she meant to bring all her influence to bear against him and the Progressivists, for she assumed that of course there was to be an amalgamation of factions. Lady Tregellis’ political circle embraced all shades of opinions. By creed and antecedents she was a Tory, but had democratic leanings. Her attitude towards politics—and, indeed, towards life in general—was one of the utmost tolerance—that of a seeker for conviction rather than of a person convinced. Her mission, she said, was to the Irreconcilables, and she professed to have done good service for her party in rubbing off sharp edges on both sides. She now announced it as her experience that uneducated millionaires could almost always, if they were properly handled, be swept into the Conservative net, and inquired of Sebastian Blythe if his interview with Mr. Aldenning had given any indication that her efforts were likely to be successful. But Sebastian shook his head. The indications had all been towards Progressivism, and O’Leary, who was frankness itself, had been positive on the point. Under no other banner than that of Progressivism would Mr. Aldenning march. Whereat Lady Tregellis exclaimed that she did not object to Progressivism in principle; it was in practice that she found its tenets as unadaptable to the needs of modern society as those of

early Christianity, which nevertheless each one of them professed every Sunday—those of them, at any rate, who went to church. She considered that the Progressivist doctrines could only become possible if discreetly blended with Tory principles—or, at least, such rational Whiggism as Lord Ravage represented. In any case, she declared herself ready to forgive Mr. Aldenning his Progressivism if he would make it the means of bringing Gavan Sarel to her house.

Alaric, from having recently made the acquaintance of Mr. Aldenning, came naturally into the discussion. He did not speak of his admiration for Miss Aldenning, but he contrived to get himself included in the social arrangements that were being talked about. Later on, he went to call upon Mrs. O'Leary, who was always at home on Sundays, and cleverly turned the conversation on to the new beauty, remarking that he had just left Lady Tregellis, who had informed him of her benevolent intentions towards the lady of the pearls. Mrs. O'Leary at once took him into her confidence. It appeared that the date of the proposed dinner-party depended on the possibility of Mr. Aldenning being called to the Hague on Concession business. That, at least, was Mrs. O'Leary's version of the difficulty; but, as a matter of fact, she was in mortal dread that, now Miss Aldenning had been seen and admired on the Terrace of the House of Commons, her prize should be snatched away, and the new beauty make her first appearance in some grander mansion than the little house in Grosvenor Road. Mrs. O'Leary had determined therefore to write notes at once, inviting Lady Tregellis, Miss Aldenning, and some other friends—Dorothea among them—to tea. Mrs. O'Leary explained that she wished to get together as many ladies of rank as the composition of her visiting-list permitted, in order that Miss Aldenning's desire to behold peeresses in private life might be gratified. The worst of

it was that reigning peeresses were not given to stray about in Grosvenor Road, and the little Australian was not sure how many, if, indeed, one at all, of these exalted personages could be trotted out. Alaric sympathized, offered suggestions, and got himself invited to the tea, and to the dinner-party in prospective, which was what he had in view.

THE SECOND ACT

NIYA NINDA KA-AIA !

(THOU ART MY LOVE!)



SCENES

IN THE WAKING LIFE

So it happened that one afternoon a collection of more or less well-born, well-groomed and fashionable men and women assembled in Mrs. O'Leary's drawing-room, awaiting with considerable curiosity the arrival of the Arruan girl. Thus she was generally called, though Mrs. O'Leary claimed her as a compatriot, on the reasoning that, although her mother had been an Arruan, her father was an Australian settler, and the girl had been born and brought up on the shores of Torres Straits.

Alaric Queste was near the door when she came in. He had already, in a second visit to the Hôtel Cecil, spoken to the object of his admiration, and was now in no manner of doubt as to the fact of his being in love. He was the first recipient of Kaia Aldenning's smile of recognition. For a moment or two she had stood uncertain, yet not abashed, looking round the dim room, before Mrs. O'Leary, who was talking to Lady Tregellis, became aware of her entrance. A faint murmur, a sudden silence in the outer circle, revealed her presence. Alaric exulted in the tribute, but the girl herself seemed as unconscious as though she were standing unobserved on her own Australian or Arruan sands. It was then that she saw Alaric, and greeted him with her enchanting smile as she

stood waiting, composed as a queen about to receive the homage of her subjects. Was it Diana Lucifera or the Huntress of the Louvre whom she recalled? Too feminine for the latter, too fearlessly expectant for the first; it was something between the two. The port of her small head was goddess-like, her slim form had the free grace of a creature of the woods, while in her soft curves and the sweetness of her expression there were suggestions of latent womanliness. The thin brownish column of her throat tilted a little backward, causing the chin to protrude slightly, and showing the flash of teeth that rivalled her own pearls, between just-parted lips, red as roses. The features were regular, the cheeks wore a faint flush on their olive, the eyes were dark and tender, as are the eyes of Arruan women. They shone with a lustre which seemed almost other-worldly, though their light differed from that in the heavenly eyes of Angela Winterbourne, who was one of those watching her. The most remarkable point in her appearance was her hair, this having the silkiness and gloss of South Sea maidens, but with a curious dash of auburn upon its darkness. There was not a shadow of sadness nor a pucker of perplexity to mar the radiance of this splendid being, who looked in truth the very personification of Nature's sweetest, gladdest mood.

Mrs. O'Leary welcomed her with effusion, and as she sipped her tea there was an excuse for the men of the party to approach her with plates of sweetmeats and rolled bread-and-butter. Kaia ate with a healthy appetite, and all the while surveyed the assemblage convened in her honour with an air of pleased anticipation; and now, perceiving on the outskirts of the small crowd a man she had met at the House of Commons—it was Mr. Herbril, the Progressivist Whip—she gave him a strange little half-savage gesture of greeting, lifting her left hand, and lightly touching her right shoulder and her forehead.

There was something very attractive in the movement, it was so curious and so gracefully performed. Alaric wondered if that was the manner in which South Sea Princesses and pearl-fishers saluted each other.

‘I’m afraid I’m late,’ she said ; and Alaric in his mind likened her voice incongruously to wild honey and roses. ‘Pà-pa is very sorry he could not come.’ She laid an infantile emphasis on the first syllable of the word, pronouncing it with a liquid softness that gave a suggestion of cooing doves. ‘A man came to him all the way from Holland, and they were talking business ; and when I saw they were having a *bujeree wùlla*, of course I didn’t like to tell Pà-pa he must get up and fetch me along.’

Alaric in his conversation with Miss Aldenning at the Cecil had become aware of her occasional lapses into the aboriginal vernacular, a fault she had frankly told him she was trying hard to overcome. He knew that *bujeree* signified something superlative, and that *wùlla* was Australese for a serious consultation. Mr. Eustace Olver was not so well informed, and put in with his neutral drawl :

‘And what does that mean?’

‘It means—oh, well’—Miss Aldenning’s beautiful eyes expressed mild surprise ; she imagined that he referred to the fact of the interview, not to the phrase — ‘when Pà-pa talks business, it generally means that he is making money ;’ and she gave a little musical laugh.

‘And I’ve no doubt, my dear,’ said Lady Tregellis, ‘that you can spend the money.’

Kaia took in the significance of the old lady’s veiled glance at her costume, which outdid that of even Miss Tolvean in its expensive simplicity, and laughed again.

‘Oh, but anybody can do that. Yes, Pà-pa said in Paris that I had no need to know a language in order to shop in it.’ She turned to the old lady with the air of one

wishing to do a good turn to a neighbour. 'Perhaps you'd like to talk business with Pà-pa?'

'Certainly I should,' replied Lady Tregellis, 'if there's any money to be made out of it. What sort of business does your father talk?'

'There are a great many sorts,' replied the girl. 'Sometimes it's mines, and sometimes it's telegraph cables. Oh, when Mr. Jessup and he get together then it is a *bujeree wulla*, and no mistake!' She laughed again, as though amused by some recollection. 'But, of course,' she went on, 'it's mostly pearls.'

'I should prefer pearls, if they were like those you have round your neck,' said Lady Tregellis. 'Did your papa get them for you?'

'He has been seven years collecting my pearls,' said Kaia. 'I've got a great many more than these. Every time the fleet came in Pà-pa used to pick out the finest for me.'

'The fleet!' repeated Lady Tregellis.

'The pearling fleet.' Then a shadow crossed the girl's face, and the dark eyes seemed suffused with tears. 'Oh! I can't bear to talk of the pearlers now. There was a cyclone up north just a little while ago, and ever so many of the boats were lost, and more than a hundred men were drowned. They were my friends—some of my best friends.' She made a little crooning sound of woe. '*Nuràga! nuràga!*'

Lady Tregellis poked forward her head, with its odd erection of snow-white puffs of hair, surmounted by the still odder bonnet and plume of marabout feathers. She laid sympathetically on the girl's arm a bird-like hand, glittering with rings.

'Sit by me, and tell me about yourself,' she said. 'This is extremely interesting. But first of all, I should like to know to what language those queer, pretty expressions of yours belong.'

Kaia coloured, and threw back her small head in pathetic but half-defiant appeal.

‘You don’t understand,’ she said. ‘It is stupid of me always to forget. Pà-pa told me that my lingo would be just blacks’ language to English people. And, of course, it is only blacks’ language, but it seems to me much prettier than the French, which is like parrots’ chattering.’

‘Quite true,’ nodded the old lady. ‘You have an ear for music; so have I. I suppose you can sing?’

‘Yes, I can sing,’ replied Kaia doubtfully; ‘that is, I don’t know if I sing in the way people sing here.’

‘And how would you say that in your language?’ pursued the old lady.

‘*Bel me pidney*,’ answered Kaia, with an irresistible drollery, which to anyone who knew the race would instantly have recalled the black gamin.

‘Quaint,’ pronounced the old lady, ‘but not so soft as the other. *Nuràga!* See what an ear I have! It means something mournful?’

‘Oh, very mournful—very mournful!’

‘*Nuràga!* Take my advice: keep to your own lingo. Don’t let them teach you to lament in English slang, like some of our young people. Now, tell me: didn’t you have any friends except pearl-fishers?’

‘There was Lewra.’

‘Lewra?’

‘She was a half-caste. Màm-ma got her to play with me when she and Pà-pa were at the out-station. We used to learn things together.’

‘Such as——’

Lady Tregellis was keenly interested.

‘*Yamma?*’ said Kaia, puzzled, and involuntarily using the native interrogation. She corrected herself. ‘I mean, do you want to know?’

'Everything. A half-caste! How remarkable! And you learned things together? What kind of things? I hope the blacks weren't cannibals, and that you didn't learn to cook and eat your neighbours?'

Kaia laughed.

'Over in New Guinea they were cannibals, but it was only Pà-pa who ever went there.'

'Well, apparently they haven't eaten him,' observed Lady Tregellis. 'Go on, my dear, and give me an account of your education.'

'Mà-ma taught us lessons in the mornings when we were little,' related Kaia. 'After Mà-ma died, there was the storekeeper.'

'The storekeeper?'

'He was a very clever old man, and quite good—when he didn't go to Thursday Island on the burst.'

Lady Tregellis was again mystified. Patrick O'Leary gave the explanation in his genial brogue. It was a common Australian disease—the alcoholic tendency concentrated into an orgie called a 'burst'—much less injurious than prolonged sipping. Kaia continued her tale:

'Pà-pa let him go once a year. He never came back till he was quite well. The last time he didn't come back at all; he died on the burst. That was nearly two years ago—before Pà-pa took me to Borneo. Since then I haven't done any lessons.'

Kaia held her audience. She was a centre of attraction; the other women gathered round, listened, and admired. Beauty, wealth, perfection of dress, a rope of priceless pearls, and the bringing up of a savage—what surer passport into the charmed circle of London civilization! Lady Rosalys Thane, who yearned for Nature unadulterated, and was always seeking after some new thing, sighed that she had not been blessed in like manner. Winnie Tolvean

thought it all delightfully original, and, being above small jealousies, made up her mind forthwith to the godmothering by Lady Tregellis of a rival beauty. Now, almost everybody put in comments and asked questions. Mrs. O'Leary had the air of a successful showman; only Mrs. Olver, being an American with a history, was silent, waiting, in vulgar phrase, to see how the cat jumped, and vaguely resentful towards Sebastian Blythe for not having given her the initiative. Dorothea Queste was silent also, but it was from a different motive, and her face was eloquent.

It appeared that Kaia's studies had been intermittent. She had had regular lessons only when the fleet was out. When the pearlers were at anchor there had been no time.

'I have heard that your mother was a foreigner,' said Lady Tregellis politely. 'Could she teach you history, and grammar, and arithmetic, and the rest of those tiresome things which I'm sure nobody could ever drill into my poor head?'

'Mà-ma was very well educated,' answered Kaia. 'She had learned from the missionaries. And my Mà-ma,' added the girl proudly, 'would have been a sort of Queen in her own island, if she could have gone back to Arru.'

'I can well believe that,' said Lady Tregellis. 'The child has a royal air,' murmured the old lady to Dorothea Queste, who was sitting beside her, and whose eyes, encountering every now and then those of Kaia, seemed to draw the girl's look as with a kind of magnetism, though they two had not as yet spoken to each other. Lady Tregellis turned again to Kaia. 'And so your mother left her own country?'

'She left it for Pà-pa's sake,' replied Kaia, 'and she never could go back again, for her people would have taken her from him and married her to one of their own chiefs. But to have Pà-pa for her husband was better

than to be Queen of her own island. There's no one in the whole world like Pà-pa.'

Dorothea spoke now, her organ voice sounding pleasantly on the girl's ear after Lady Tregellis' wiry treble.

'You must care for your father very much, since you have only had each other—he and you.'

'There's nobody in the world like Pà-pa,' repeated Kaia.

'I can understand the feeling between you,' Dorothea went on. 'It must be something the same as that which my son and I have towards each other—my only son.'

'There's been only Pà-pa and me,' said Kaia, 'since Màmà died seven years ago. And then we made a sort of compact, we two, and Pà-pa began to collect the pearls of this necklace, so that I should always be reminded of it—twelve pearls for every year of my life. That was because of Màmà's prophecy.'

Pressed by Lady Rosalys, Kaia detailed the prophecy.

'Màmà was very strange in some ways. She had the Eyes to see—some of the Islanders have, you know. She knew what was going to happen. She always said that the sea and the trees and the wind told her. She prophesied before she went away that I should cross the big water and live among grand white ladies, and be one of them, and perhaps win the love of a great white chief. But of this she was not certain, for even those who have the Eyes to see may not read the fates of their nearest and dearest. And then Pà-pa said that if it were to be so he must come too, for we could not be separated; and he told me that my chain of pearls should be a sign and a bond between us that we were never to be parted.'

Kaia's eyes deepened mysteriously, so that all the light seemed to go out of them, and for the moment they became fathomless pools of blackness. Somebody remarked—it was Sebastian Blythe—that the chain of pearls was a poetic idea, but no one asked any more questions about

her mother. Presently Dorothea led her back to talk of her childhood.

‘It would be very interesting to hear how you used to pass your time out in that wild place—you and the half-caste Lewra. How pretty your native words are!’

‘We had a good deal to do,’ said Kaia. ‘You see, in the stormy weather the pearlers couldn’t sail out of the Pass, and in our house there would be quite a number of captains to provide for. So Lewra and I used to go with our guns and shoot wild pigs and birds; and there was a pool in the rocks where at high-tide we could spear fish. You can’t think what good sport that was. But after Pà-pa took me to Borneo he would not let me do that any more.’

‘Borneo!’ Lady Tregellis mentally consulted her atlas. ‘Why should Borneo have objected to your spearing fish?’

Mr. Olver remarked that he had always understood the Dyaks of Borneo preferred scalping humans.

‘We had nothing to do with the Dyaks,’ said Kaia. ‘It was Mr. Jessup of Shanghai who objected to my blacks’ ways.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ exclaimed Dorothea. ‘Mr. Jessup of Shanghai seems to be a little god in the East—so at least my son tells me.’

Alaric and Kaia nodded to each other with a sense of mutual confidence. They both knew Jessup of Shanghai.

‘Mr. Jessup told Pà-pa that it was not right for me to grow up in that wild way among blacks and Chinamen and pearlers. He told Pà-pa that it was time he made a European lady of me.’

‘Oh dear! oh dear! what a misguided person!’ murmured Lady Tregellis.

‘Of course, Mā-ma was a lady,’ Kaia went on; ‘but she was not a European lady. There are many kinds of ladies.’

'Most true, O Princess!' said Eustace Olver.

'I should only be a Princess in my own country,' replied Kaia with dignity. 'I am not a Princess in England.'

Alaric had stolen behind his mother.

'Isn't she adorable?' he whispered.

Dorothea's lips gave an assent which her eyes seemed to belie. Alaric fancied that there was something almost sinister in her glance towards Kaia.

'You don't like her!' he exclaimed.

'On the contrary, I quite believe—though most people would find it hard to do so—that her Arcadian innocence is perfectly sincere.'

'Then Pà-pa and I consulted together,' Kaia went on, in answer to a timid question from Angela Winterbourne, 'and we reminded each other of what Màm-ma had prophesied.'

'That you were to marry a great white chief,' put in Sebastian Blythe, who, notwithstanding his admirable qualities, occasionally struck a false note.

Race told, even though it were barbarian race, thought Lady Tregellis, in the stately simplicity of Kaia's reply.

'That is not what I was thinking—oh, not in the least; for I could not marry a man who was not great and strong and noble like Pà-pa. I have never seen anyone a little bit like Pà-pa—except—perhaps——'

She hesitated and paused.

'Sure, Miss Aldenning, they'll find it easier to bear disappointment, if you'll let the boys know the exception,' said Pat O'Leary.

'It was only a fancy,' said Kaia. 'No, that is not what I was thinking. Well, Pà-pa and I remembered what Màm-ma had said about my living among great white ladies, and I thought I should not like to feel quite strange and lonely among them; and so Pà-pa said Mr. Jessup was quite right, and that he would bring me over to Europe

while I was quite young and still had time to learn to be like them. That was the difficulty out there, for I had never known a white lady. There were none on the Pass, and Pà-pa knew only a very few on the mainland, who weren't grand at all. We could not tell in the least what I must do or who would teach us.'

'The lady novelists,' suggested Mr. Olver.

'*Yamma*?' broke again unconsciously from Kaia.

'Do you mean to say that there are no novels on the Pass?' asked Miss Tolvean.

'I don't know. I don't like books,' said Kaia. 'Mà-ma always said that the waves and the wind told better stories than books.'

'Oh, my dear!' cried Mrs. O'Leary, 'you mustn't utter such heresies in literary circles.'

'Why not? It is what I feel,' said Kaia. 'I have only read one book through in my life, and that is since I came to Europe.'

'Oh, happy author!' said Sebastian Blythe; and they all wanted to know how she had come to read this book and who had written it.

'I found it in the hotel at Paris,' said Kaia. 'We couldn't go out because it was raining and I had a cold, and I got interested—oh, very much interested! It was because that book was written by Lord Ravage that I begged Mr. O'Leary and Mr. Olver to show him to me.' She smiled gratefully at Eustace Olver. 'Only, somehow, when I spoke to him I didn't dare to tell him how much I liked his book.'

'I wonder why it made such an impression upon you?' said Lady Rosalys.

'I don't know. It seemed to be telling me things I had always known. It made me think of Mà-ma and of all she used to talk to me about when we sat on the seashore together; and I liked the pictures in the book—they were

beautiful pictures! They, too, brought Màmà back to me and her strange fancies, and the world of spirits she believed in. I should like to know the person who drew those pictures.'

'You know her already,' Alaric proudly announced. Perhaps never in his life had he felt so proud of his mother.

'You?' cried Kaia, turning on Dorothea wistful eyes in which there was a vague puzzlement. That puzzled look suggested that the girl was trying, not altogether successfully, to correct an already-formed impression. She added sweetly, with another smile at Alaric and a look back again at Dorothea: 'I know now why I liked him when he came to see us. It was because he was your son. And he is an artist, too. I think you and Màmà would have understood each other. I should like to see some more of your beautiful drawings.'

Dorothea's stiffness, which was so unusual with her, melted. She replied almost caressingly. Presently Lady Tregellis brought Kaia back to the Pass.

'My dear child,' she began with abrupt solemnity, 'Mr. Jessup may be a very famous person at Shanghai; but if he advised your father to try and turn you into a London woman, he made a very great mistake, and you can tell your papa so with my compliments. It would be a thousand pities to spoil you.'

'That's just what Pà-pa said,' returned Kaia, with frank relief. 'Yes, I'll give him your message, and I'm sure he'll be very pleased. But you do see now why I was anxious to study some *real* ladies? Mrs. O'Leary and Mrs. Olver were very kind. They said they weren't themselves exactly what I meant, but they'd find me someone who was.'

She looked round inquiringly. The old lady crinkled up her eyes, vastly amused.

'Oh, it ain't easy to define us. You'll need an East-End committee for that.'

The others were laughing.

'Have I said anything wrong?' asked Kaia.

'You are quite delicious!' exclaimed Miss Tolvean. 'No, you mustn't study me. I don't count any more than Mrs. Olver and Mrs. O'Leary and my dear Mrs. Queste. I'm not a real lady.'

'But I'd like to know what you are,' said Kaia. 'Our storekeeper taught me some of the names—Marchioness, Countess, Baroness.' She repeated the words like a lesson painstakingly remembered. 'That's right, isn't it?'

'Yes, that's quite right; but we don't run to Marchionesses to-day. Lady Alistair, you're at the top of the class.'

Miss Tolvean signed to a stately and stupid-looking woman in black, who now coloured shyly when Kaia turned to her, candidly elate.

'Oh, I'm so glad! Are you a real Countess?'

'A sort of one,' Lady Alistair shamefacedly admitted.

'She's Caroline, Countess,' explained Miss Tolvean.

'But may I call you Countess? It sounds so nice.'

'Oh no, you mustn't call me that,' cried Lady Alistair.

The young savage waited expectant, mutely interrogating Lady Tregellis.

'Aunt Harriet is lower down,' went on Miss Tolvean, 'but she's genuine, as far as she goes.'

The old lady's plumes shook again.

'Upon my word I ain't sure. Rose's factory girls wouldn't own me; they don't consider me smart enough.'

'Who is real?' asked Kaia.

'They are all real,' said Mr. Olver, 'only they won't own up.'

Kaia's gaze rested with satisfaction upon Lady Rosalys, who of all approached nearest to her ideal.

'Are you a Countess, too?' she asked.

'Oh dear no! not even a sort of one.'

'Explain yourself, Rose,' cried Miss Tolvean.

Lady Rosalys could not speak for laughing; most of the others were laughing, too.

'You don't seem much older than I am,' said Kaia. 'I wish I knew what to call you.'

'My name is Rosalys,' said the young widow, still laughing; then, as she noticed Kaia's sensitive flush, added gravely: 'You will soon get to understand all about us. We are very rude to laugh. I am quite sure that your queens and princesses in the South Seas would not laugh at us because we had not learned their peerage.'

'No, they would not,' answered Kaia, in good faith. 'Mà-ma never laughed when the strangers came.' She stopped, and began again with halting delicacy. 'I do so want to know—the storekeeper told me—don't you ever wear'—and she touched her forehead—'a kind of crown?'

'My sister-in-law has a thing she wears in the evenings,' said Lady Rosalys, still with great gravity. 'But you will see a lot of people with them—in the evening.'

'And never in the daytime?' said Kaia, with the air of a docile child.

'No; except on great occasions, you know—coronations, and when the Queen opens Parliament.'

Kaia seemed to ponder, as though she were readjusting her point of view.

'I understand,' she said at last. 'Nothing is quite what one fancies it to be. I used to make pictures in my mind as I sat by the seashore and dreamed dreams of beautiful ladies wearing magnificent dresses and crowns upon their heads, moving about in a splendid city of marble and gold. I never imagined that London would be so dark and gloomy. Life is not like dreams.'

‘ Ah, if it were !’ murmured Angela Winterbourne.

The plaintive note in the girl’s voice appealed more or less to everyone present. Each was to him or herself convicted of vulgar levity. How had they dared to laugh ? It was they who had been ignorant in their inability to recognise a celestial visitant whose fantasies had been born in some higher region of which they, poor worldlings ! had no knowledge.

There was a little silence. Lady Alistair got up, and the groups broke, several people taking their departure. Most of them expressed the hope that they might meet Kaia again. The men lingered, doing their best to draw from the girl more artless revelations. But Kaia, though still frank and sweet, had put on a certain native stateliness, and was keeping guard over her blacks’ lingo. She had had her first lesson, and Dorothea told herself that before many weeks the process of civilization would be fairly well advanced, and the sharp edge taken off that originality which now so delighted these London folks.

INTERLUDE

DOROTHEA called on the Aldennings at the Hôtel Cecil, to find that the father and daughter had left London on a short visit to the Hague. Alaric was deeply disappointed, his mother faintly relieved ; she had not been able to shake off the uncanny presentiment which had haunted her since the first mention of Sarel's introduction to Kaia. At least, she reflected, during the girl's absence there could be no nearer approach to intimacy.

She knew that they had met since that first time on the Terrace of the House of Commons ; that Sarel himself had been to see the millionaire, and had practically enrolled him under the Progressivist banner. Through Sebastian Blythe and Patrick O'Leary she learned the Chief's decision that Mr. Aldenning should be nominated to the first seat vacant in the party.

Since that midnight interview with Dorothea, Sarel had been twice to the studio. These were more or less conventional visits, paid in the darkling afternoon during the hours when she was at home only to him and to Lord Ravage. On one of these occasions the two leaders had met. It had been a carefully-planned encounter—planned at Sarel's instance, with no connivance on the part of Ravage—and conducted with all Dorothea's tact and diplomacy. Such a meeting would have been difficult under any other conditions. Who could tell to what far-reaching results it might lead ? Dorothea exulted a little in the thought that her workshop might therefrom become

historic. She was a woman with keen appreciation of dramatic elements, and this bringing together through her instrumentality of the two men most talked of in the political world, each of whom was her lover, thrilled her nerves with a sense of power which dulled for the moment that mental pain now almost habitual. The excitement of the situation was sweet to her, as excitement of the kind is to most emotional natures, though Dorothea could hardly understand the moral nausea she undoubtedly experienced in her moods of reaction. Augustus Charafta might have explained this on the principle of spiritual development, and the throwing off of morbid matter; and, indeed, Dorothea herself attributed it to revolt against the falseness of her position towards Ravage, and to the feeling she had of having requited with treachery the noble affection he lavished upon her. But she fought the stings of conscience, telling herself in extenuation that there was no real treachery, that she was under no obligation to confide wholly in Ravage, that she had scrupulously defined her attitude, had professed no more than the tenderest friendship, and had given in full measure that for which he had bargained, if such a term could be applied to his disinterested stipulation for sympathy, companionship, intellectual co-operation. These were all he had asked for, and these she had joyed in giving. For the rest, her relations with Sarel did not affect herself alone; they involved also his repute, and she insisted in self-exculpation that under no circumstances would honour justify her in divulging them. All else in her life was open as day to her friend; this door only she kept shut, and it was her right, she maintained, to hold it barred against him. Besides, in many ways—so flowed her casuistic self-defence—Ravage was more truly her confidant than that other man, who, nevertheless, was all the world to her. Temperament and associations closed several doors between them.

Sarel knew nothing of her mystic tendencies, of the yearnings of her higher self, of all the artistic side of her nature, with which Ravage was in full sympathy. His poet's instinct comprehended them all, whereas to Sarel they seemed a dead letter. Often had Dorothea declared to her inmost self that it was with her soul she loved Ravage, with her living being Sarel. Often had she reasoned inwardly upon that overmastering infatuation, independent of mind and will, which from her first acquaintance with Sarel had made her helpless as a straw in a whirlpool. Over and over again, had she tried to crush it, to escape from it, and had at last come to accept it as a fate with which it was vain to struggle. This infatuation seemed incorporated into her being; it pulsed with her heart; it was the pivot upon which her life turned; it was, she told herself shudderingly, her doom.

And of all these conflicting scruples, emotions, tragic self-upbraidings, both men were ignorant. As she had been silent to Ravage on the subject of her intimacy with Sarel, so she had been reticent with Sarel in regard to the closeness of her tie with Ravage. No doubt, to a certain extent, he suspected the fact; he knew that they were distantly related; he knew that she was in the Liberal leader's confidence; he knew that they were fellow-workers, and saw each other continually. He might easily have guessed that Lord Ravage would have married Dorothea had she been free, but he was too certain of Dorothea's love for the suspicion to cause him any uneasiness.

The meeting of the two men at Dorothea's studio was a success. It was the first time there had been any intercourse between them in the ordinary social sense, for though they had, of course, a formal acquaintanceship in the House of Commons, it had never gone beyond those limits.

Dorothea at the beginning steered the talk, and so cleverly, that unconsciously Ravage was drawn off his guard,

and by-and-by when she left them, withdrawing to the etching-room on the excuse of finishing a plate for Ravage to pronounce upon, the ice had been broken. Sarel's curious personal magnetism was producing an effect, and the political situation was discussed with a frankness that would have surprised even those most confident of a cordial understanding between the two leaders. Sarel took his leave first, and thus had no word with Dorothea. She expected him that evening, but he did not come.

Now, when she was left alone with Lord Ravage, she noticed a constraint in his manner, and knew that he would have liked to question her about Sarel, but that chivalrous respect for her reserve withheld him. She on her part was afraid to show too great eagerness as to the result of the interview, but her face betrayed her anxiety.

‘You want to know what I think of him?’ said Ravage.

‘Yes.’

He did not answer directly, but said :

‘It was strange our meeting here.’

She came nearer, her eyes alight.

‘You guess that it was I who arranged it?’

‘I thought as much.’

‘Are you vexed with me?’

‘You know that I could never under any circumstances be vexed with you. I am perhaps a little sorry that you did not consult me first.’

‘And if I had done so, you would have suspected some deep-laid political plot, and would have refused. You would have been afraid of the papers getting hold of the meeting, as they must have done if it had taken place anywhere else.’

‘That is true,’ he replied, and added, after a moment's pause : ‘Sarel is a keen judge of character. Candour and magnanimity have an unfailing charm for me. He showed

both. I respect the man who is clever enough—or stupid enough—to give himself away. No, I am not sorry that I have had this talk with Sarel. He makes me see my own way more clearly.'

'You would be prepared to go a certain length with him—to secure yourself by letting him into your Cabinet?'

'We look too far ahead,' he answered, with a smile. 'There is no question yet of my Cabinet.'

It shortly became certain, however, that the question of a new Ministry was imminent. In an important division the Government majority was reduced still lower, the vote being tantamount to a defeat. All sorts of rumours were rife. A Cabinet Council was hastily summoned. Messengers were flying hither and thither. Interviewers were on the alert, and Lord Ravage's house in Half-Moon Street became a centre of journalistic interest. Either the Ministry must resign or Parliament must be dissolved.

SCENES

The guests waiting in Mrs. O'Leary's little drawing-room for the somewhat delayed announcement of dinner were discussing the chances of a General Election. This dinner was that social event which had been planned for the introduction of Kaia. The Aldennings had returned a few days back from the Hague, and the other guests had been hurriedly got together. It took place on the very eve of the political announcement. The party, when at last placed, was not a large one. There were, of course, Lady Tregellis, who sat on her host's right, and her niece. Mr. Eustace Olver, who, in spite of his democratic leanings, would one day be a peer, conducted Mrs. O'Leary. No one could have guessed that this refined exquisite, with

his curled flaxen moustache and tired smile, was the fierce revolutionary whose thunders in the *Torch* shook the United Kingdom, who had been imprisoned in the Clock Tower for defiance of the Speaker's ruling—the Radicals had made profitable capital out of that imprisonment—whom the great Tory ladies declared ought to be roasted before a slow fire as a renegade and traitor to his order. Nor, for the matter of that, would one have suspected beaming, benevolent Pat O'Leary of having been privy to conspiracy and assassination, as in the old days of Fenianism his enemies had stated. Mrs. Olver was beside Sebastian Blythe, and was doing her best to renew a once ardent friendship. Then there were Dorothea Queste and her son, the Progressivist Whip, and the correspondent of a great New York Daily, who was late in arriving; and lastly Mr. Aldenning and his daughter, seated respectively on the left of their host and hostess.

Kaia looked more beautiful than ever in another French gown of artfully designed and, indeed, almost classical plainness, and with no ornaments but the chain of wonderful pearls. Alaric's attention scarcely wandered from her; he had the joy of being placed next her at table, and this evening he certainly did not maintain his reputation for sprightly talk as far as the general company was concerned. The young man had become strangely subdued since the dawn of his devotion for Kaia. During her recent absence his whole mind had been concentrated upon the arrangement of his new studio, that it might be fit for the reception of his divinity, and also in order for the kimono tea, of which she—not Miss Tolvean—was to be the leading feature, and the date of which only waited her decision.

Lady Tregellis looked approvingly at the girl, greeting her almost with affection. She had not yet, however, consented seriously to be Kaia's sponsor at the Drawing-room.

First, she had told Sebastian Blythe, she wanted to make certain that 'Pà-pa' was possible.

Dorothea, too, had some curiosity as to the appearance and manners of the millionaire, and was now obliged to admit that Alaric's judgment had been correct. There was no doubt about 'Pà-pa.' It was a personality that would ride safely through London reefs. The man was rough, but with the roughness of forests and rocks and vast expanses of Nature. As a type, he was magnificent. His rugged face, burnt red-brown, with its impressive features, its penetrating blue eyes, bristling red-gray brows, and flaming beard, would have suited either an Australian bullock-driver or a Norse hero. Mr. Olver or his reporter had exaggerated the grammatical lapses; if an aspirate fluttered now and then, the voice had an un-English burr which was in itself a plea and a distinction. Besides, he had the immense merit of only speaking when addressed, and then with deliberate enunciation and commendable brevity. He did not handle his knife and fork quite in the manner of Sebastian Blythe, for example, but he was so entirely without self-consciousness that all such minor details seemed of absolute unimportance. There are some self-made men who give the impression of strength because they assert themselves; there are others who produce a much greater effect from seeming to efface themselves. Horace Aldenning was one of the last. He said scarcely anything; he did nothing; he sat stolid, observant, and at ease; yet of all the company there was not one—his daughter may be excepted—who was so definitely a force and fact. Lady Tregellis remarked later that he reminded her of an American Indian chief, whom a certain freak of fate had brought to London, and whom she pronounced the best-bred person she had ever met.

'He'll do,' she whispered now to Pat O'Leary as she

eyed the millionaire across the table. 'In his way, he is as original as the girl.' She had been listening to his concise remarks on the subject of coral reefs in the Pass. Mrs. O'Leary's Australian associations had suggested this and some kindred topics. 'It's such a mercy,' went on the old lady, 'that he doesn't want to say much. That's the mistake these new men always make. We shouldn't mind 'em if they'd only hold their tongues.'

Certainly the other guests did not follow Mr. Aldenning's example of taciturnity, and the dinner was sufficiently cheerful, making up in vivacious conversation what it lacked in other respects. Eustace Olver, popularly credited with the fiery passions of a Danton and the appetite of a Heliogabalus, ate or did not eat with smiling indifference, drinking cold water out of his champagne-glass as though it had been the choicest vintage—the water was not cold, by the way, nor the champagne either, both having become lukewarm under the influence of a gas chandelier and a blazing fire—while every now and then he bleated forth with imperturbable gravity an amusing story. It was under cover of one of these, and after the fish, that the New York journalist shuffled into his place, with an apology based partly on the exigencies of the political situation, and partly on the stupidity of the cabman, who hadn't been able to find the house.

'Ye should have told him it was close by the old Milbank Prison,' said O'Leary. 'And, faith, that might have been convanient in the days gone by.'

'Have you ever been in gaol, Pol?' asked the journalist.

'No ; but a good few of my friends have,' replied Pat—'beginning with the late John Boyle O'Reilly, who I'm proud to acknowledge as such, and ending with me honoured friend the editor of the *Torch*.'

Whereat Mr. Olver gave an entertaining account of

his recent conflict with the Sergeant-at-Arms, which had convulsed the House and, it was asserted, brought about the downfall of the Government.

'It used to be considered respectable for an Oirish patriot to live near a gaol,' resumed Pat O'Leary; 'and the habit continues, though the cause is dead and done for. That's what I tell Kitty when she envies Mrs. Queste her genteel location in Chelsea.'

'We can't afford a house in Cheyne Walk,' pathetically observed Mrs. O'Leary. 'We've got to wait for that till Pat is made editor of an evening paper, and then we should have to live over the printing-works, for he'd never be at the office in time.'

'When that paper is started ye won't be hearing much of the *Pall Mall* or any of the rest of them,' said Pat. 'No shabby half-and-half principles, nor sitting on the fence, I can tell you. It won't be Grosvenor Road nor Cheyne Walk then. It'll be Grosvenor Square, and I'll be getting meself measured for a new dress-suit. Ye wouldn't believe, perhaps, Lady Tregellis, that I was an Oirish patriot when me coat was new?'

And now came some peculiar dish of Antipodean origin, compounded of kangaroo tails and young Indian corn, which Mrs. O'Leary pressed vainly on Eustace Olver.

'Ye know, Eustace,' expostulated Pat O'Leary, 'the last time you and I dined together ye were aitin' sponge-cake and ham and raspberry jam all together; and after that ye can't jib at anything.'

Mr. Olver explained that this happened at a dinner provided in a country tavern on the occasion of a political meeting.

'I didn't mind the ham,' said he, 'but when I asked for bread they brought me, not a stone, but sponge-cakes.'

'Sure, and the landlord wouldn't demane himself by

putting such a common thing as bread before you,' said O'Leary.

'I don't think Mr. Olver need have despised my cray-fish soup,' said Mrs. O'Leary.

'I'm bound to say, my dear,' remarked Pat, 'that of the two I think the sponge-cakes and ham were less injurious.'

The talk was not all of this frivolous kind. Lady Tregellis was able to extract some interesting political information from Eustace Olver and O'Leary, and between these three the immediate destinies of England were promptly settled, while the American correspondent opposite gleaned a good deal of valuable copy, more or less accurate, which duly found its way over the Atlantic. And Kaia made Alaric happy by professing eager delight at the prospect of his kimono tea, and by consenting to wear a costume which he mentally selected as in harmony with her hair and eyes; more supremely happy still by confiding to him her innocent impressions of London, in which, as she phrased it, she was feeling 'bushed,' and by entreating him to act a brother's part, and to instruct her in those social complexities her ignorance of which had provoked the mirth of Mrs. O'Leary's friends. A brother! That was all very well for a beginning, thought Alaric, and quite a satisfactory basis for something much more romantic; but he endeavoured to convey to her that his solicitude in regard to her social welfare was not purely fraternal, and whether Kaia understood or not what he was driving at, she, at any rate, did not appear displeased.

Meanwhile Dorothea, at the other end of the table, improved her acquaintance with Kaia's father. He had interested her from the first report; he interested her still more now that she knew he would probably enter Parliament under Gavan Sarel's leadership. He, in his turn, was interested in her both as woman and as Alaric's

mother. She had a frank friendly fashion of attacking men of his kind—men who were by reason of circumstances out of the atmosphere, and who must be made to feel that they were creating their own atmosphere and drawing others into it. She very soon accomplished this result, and gradually the strings of his tongue loosened. There was one subject upon which he could be almost eloquent, that was his daughter Kaia. He was anxious to find a woman-friend for Kaia. This surely would be natural, since he, Aldenning, had, as he phrased it, cottoned to Mrs. Queste's son. There was a great deal, he said, in that young man. Jessup of Shanghai had discovered the fact, and Jessup's penetration had never yet been known at fault in the judgment of men and matters. Then, too, since Mrs. Queste and her son were both artists, and since Kaia had pronounced the lady's work to be more than *bujeree*, might he not hope that Mrs. Queste would look at Kaia's drawings and advise him as to the cultivation of her gift. He did not himself think that Kaia had much talent that way, but other people had told him—some of the broken-down artists on Thursday Island who had wanted to give her lessons, which he would not allow—that she had a gift. Well, Mrs. Queste could see for herself. His own idea was that only in music would Kaia excel. She had a gift in her voice—there was no doubt about that—only, of course, she wanted teaching. She needed teaching all round, and the girl was ambitious and had set her heart on learning everything there was to be learned. As for her drawing, ever since she was a pickaninny she had scratched pictures on the beach, on the rocks, on the top of flour-barrels and rum-kegs. When Dorothea suggested absently the obvious parallel of young Giotto, Mr. Aldenning stared, and announced without shame that he knew nothing about Giotto. It was clear, too, that he had only grasped herself and Alaric from the

human standpoint, not the artistic one—humanly in relation to Kaia. She wondered whether it had occurred to Mr. Aldenning that Alaric might cherish presumptuous hopes. He spoke, however, of Alaric's forthcoming exhibition.

'Blythe tells me that your son is thought to have great promise—that he knows what he is about,' said the millionaire.

And Dorothea answered that there was a big gulf between knowing what one was about in art and the possession of genius, which was the only test of a great artist.

'Genius!' repeated Mr. Aldenning, ignoring the tremendous significance, to an artist, of the word. 'Well, I conclude there's a good many sorts of genius.' And he made a remark which struck Dorothea as profound. 'What strikes me, ma'am, is, that there's something much rarer and more profitable than genius, and that's a good all-round working intellect.'

Dorothea assented.

'I've seen a lot of what they call genius lying about in scraps among diggers and pearlers and beach-combers,' he went on—'men that could paint, and write, and fiddle; men that had made one success, and gone to the dogs after it—mostly through drink. There seems to be a sort of connection between genius and grog. I'm glad to observe that your son doesn't like grog.'

'Alaric is almost a teetotaler,' said Dorothea.

Mr. Aldenning gave a slow Jovian bend of his great head in approbation of the fact.

'I wouldn't have those Thursday Island geniuses hanging round the Pass,' he said, after a ruminative pause. 'I wouldn't let them so much as touch the hem of my Kaia's garment, though she was always for being taught. I said to myself that she'd take no harm from the blacks and the

Malays, and even the Chinamen; but if it was to be European influence, why, then I was determined—and Jessup of Shanghai agreed with me—it should be tip-top—the very best.'

'You were right,' said Dorothea. 'Lady Tregellis would endorse your opinion.'

'She's a shrewd old lady, that,' said Mr. Aldenning, turning his deliberate gaze towards the head of the table and taking in comprehensively, as Dorothea realized, Lady Tregellis' merits and foibles. 'She means business; she's not to be caught with salt. That's what I like. I know where I am with people that mean business.'

Mr. Aldenning had, perhaps, never opened himself out so freely to a woman, his wife and daughter excepted, and Dorothea appreciated the distinction.

* * * * *

Presently Mrs. O'Leary made her little signal to Lady Tregellis, and the ladies trooped up the narrow staircase. Pat had been enjoined by his wife to 'hurry up' over cigars and politics, and before long the gentlemen followed. Then, steered by Sebastian Blythe, Mr. Aldenning brought himself to a standstill in front of Lady Tregellis, who motioned him to a vacant chair by her side. Each had been given beforehand, so to speak, a map of the country, and in a surprisingly short time arrived at a meeting-point. Lady Tregellis asked a good many questions, and Mr. Aldenning replied to them laconically, but with understanding. The Great New Guinea Concession Scheme was incidentally referred to, and the old lady deplored with some humour her ill-luck in the matter of speculation, and the unfortunate disabilities of a dowager whose jointure was insufficient for the maintenance of her position. She was so comical over the relation of her financial misfortunes that anyone would have believed her entirely in earnest. Mr. Eustace Olver, standing behind,

however, smiled, for he knew, and so did Pat O'Leary, that there wasn't in London a more capable business head than that of Lady Tregellis. Mr. Aldenning conveyed, with a directness that was almost barbaric, the gratification it would afford him to acknowledge, according to the donor's fancy, any benefits conferred upon his daughter Kaia.

'I'm a plain man, my lady,' he said, 'and it has been my habit through life never to ask a favour without paying for it—in pearls or kind.'

The old lady crinkled up her bright eyes, and her wrinkled forehead seemed to disappear beneath the snowy puffs of hair.

'I'm sure,' she said, 'that if you paid for favours with pearls like those your daughter is wearing, the people who got them must have felt they had made a pretty good bargain; but though the *Torch* is cryin' us down for taking to trade—and what else are we to do, my good man, when we're most of us broke?—still, we ain't quite so horribly mercantile as all that.'

Mr. Aldenning smiled inscrutably, but said nothing.

'I'm delighted to make your acquaintance,' went on Lady Tregellis. 'Your daughter is charming—so amusing. I want some of my friends to know her. You must both come and dine with me. And now I'll tell you what you can do, since you are a business man, and I ain't by any means a business woman. They do rob us poor lone creatures in the City. You shall put me on to a good investment. I love a gamble.'

Mr. Aldenning smiled again, but again said nothing.

Then Lady Tregellis made a diversion by asking whether Mr. Aldenning cared for music, and on his reply in the affirmative, advised him to lose no time in applying for a box on the grand tier for the forthcoming opera season, to which the Australian answered that he had already commissioned Sebastian Blythe to act for him in the matter.

'Such a useful person,' said Lady Tregellis. 'Just at present he is my literary adviser. And mind, when my volumes of "Reminiscences" come out, I shall expect you not only to stock your pearl-fishers' library and recommend the book to your friends, but you'll have to laugh at my jokes as well, which you may find a little more difficult.'

Then the old lady had some further advice to give as to the position of the opera-box, and Mr. Aldenning ventured to hope that if Lady Tregellis had no box of her own she would make full use of his when he got it.

'A trifle blunt,' said Lady Tregellis, speaking of him later; 'but when a man has spent all his life diving for treasure—and finding it—there are great allowances to be made. And then he is quiet—it is such a mercy that he is quiet.'

The offer of the opera-box pleased the old lady, for she was passionately fond of music, and it was one of her frequently-aired grievances that stalls at Covent Garden were so expensive.

Mrs. Olver, hovering near, looked malevolent. Not that she wanted the use of an opera-box, for she was rich enough to have one of her own, but it was disagreeably impressed upon her that it had not occurred, even to Sebastian Blythe, whom once she had considered her own property, to propose her as an eligible chaperon for the new beauty.

Mrs. Olver, in her somewhat chequered social career, had made much use of Sebastian Blythe. One of the reasons why she hated Dorothea Queste, though she masked her enmity, was because of the half-morbid infatuation with which the artist had inspired Sebastian Blythe.

Lady Tregellis asked her new friends to dinner, promising that they should meet some nice people. She had now practically engaged herself to present Kaia. Also,

she knew just the house to suit Mr. Aldenning—of course, he mustn't stay any longer at the Hôtel Cecil—a house which belonged to a cousin of her own whose daughters were all married, and who, yearning for tranquillity all the year round, might, Lady Tregellis thought, be induced to let it on a longer lease, or even to part with it altogether to an eligible purchaser.

By this time the little drawing-rooms were crowded, and the tuning of a violin had begun. Mrs. O'Leary always provided good music for her guests, and a certain famous pianist present to-night, with whom she was a great favourite, was frequently to be heard at the Bohemian gatherings in Grosvenor Road. After the violin solo, he played deliciously, poetically, half improvising, lavishing his powers as he never condescended to do when paid a huge fee for performing in some great house. Presently he broke into a wild sort of melody, inexpressibly plaintive, in which, to the fancy of the Australians, might be discerned the sighing of ti-tree-boughs, the melancholy call of curlews, the perfume of wattle and scented gum. Most people knew, when they saw Mrs. O'Leary take her place near the piano, that it was the prelude to her famous 'Coo-ēē' song. Mrs. O'Leary had an exquisite voice, and in her native songs was held unrivalled, so that nobody thought of leaving a party while there was a chance of hearing her.

The musician was a man of soul and discernment. He watched Kaia's face while Mrs. O'Leary's sweet long-drawn 'coo-ēēs'—the despairing wail of a mother for her child lost in the Bush—filled the stuffy room, and carried the young Australian girl away back to her own forests and her own wild seashore. The musician saw dramatic feeling in her face, music in her eyes, heard music, too, in her throat; for at the close of the song the lost child's dying 'coo-ēēs' were supposed to chime with the despair-

ing mother's lament, and here Mrs. O'Leary, nodding to Kaia, made an imperative sign that she should take up the note. Then the girl let her voice out in all its liquid sweetness, that halcyon voice in which there was an almost startling pathos.

'Coo-ēē! Coo-ēē!'

The two calls replied to, repeated, and blended with each other, the one rich, full, thrilling passionately upward in agonizing appeal to Heaven, the other a swan-note dying down into the vast lower silence of the Bush.

There was an emotional hush. Never had Mrs. O'Leary's 'Coo-ēē' song, popular as it was, produced such an impression. The musician sprang from his seat and took Kaia's hands in his own, pressing them with an artist's fervour.

'But you can sing!' he cried. 'You haf not been taught, but it ees the nightingale in dat little throat. Now you must sing your own song, and I will play for you.'

He would take no denial.

'I cannot sing anything but blacks' Ugals, and how could you play the accompaniment of those?' said Kaia.

'How could I play the accompaniment for those?' indignantly replied the musician, shaking back his shock of hair. 'Haf I not a soul? Do I not comprehend? What is blacks' Ugal? Now I will tell you; you shall not speak. Is it not the barbarian grief you will make? Is it not the music of Nature? Is it not as the songs of my little friend'—he patted Mrs. O'Leary's hand affectionately—'which tell the language of her forests? Do I not know that? Can I not speak to Nature, too? Can I not play the wind, and the birds, and the trees, and the barbarous chant? See! Blacks' Ugal! Gif me the idea, the motive; tell me the scene. It is enough.'

Kaia clapped her hands, first crooning softly a sort of

tom-tom beat; then, swaying her lithe body, she imitated with her arms the motion of spears clashing.

‘So!’ she said. ‘The gins sit round the great fires; it is moonlight; all the blacks are gathered for a corroboree. The gins strike with boomerangs on the shields; the old men hit their nulla-nullas together, and wave the womeras; and the braves dance, and the chiefs shout in a long monotonous wail like the howling of native dogs in a scrub. And now, indeed, it would be very wonderful if you could play that.’

‘He couldn’t, unless he had heard it,’ said Mrs. O’Leary. ‘Nor the gibbering of the laughing jackass; no, nor the note of the mopoke. It’s Australian—pure Australian. Oh no, he couldn’t play that!’

‘And, indeed, me dear,’ said Pat O’Leary, ‘it’s as well that he can’t.’

‘Sing!’ cried the musician—‘sing, and you will hear what I can play! No, I will not let you go. You have the music in that little throat, and for me you shall sing.’

Kaia had tried to take her hands away, but he held her firm, and led her, half resisting, forward to the piano. There was a chorus of entreaty. Even were the girl to howl like her own native dogs, she would at least be beautiful to look at.

‘Sing, my girlie,’ said her father, watching her with quiet pride.

He had no doubt as to the success of the Ugal.

‘Oh, sing!’ cried Mrs. O’Leary and Alaric together.

Surely never was chant so wild and weird given out among an assemblage of men in black evening coats, and women with diamond-bedecked heads and shoulders!

The musician let her sing a phrase or two. It was curious to watch his face as he seized and assimilated the spirit and the note of the song. He made her softly hum

the air. Then gradually, and at first scarcely audibly, he improvised an accompaniment which justified his boast. Perhaps he did not quite succeed in reproducing the native dogs' howl, and that, as Pat O'Leary said, was well; but he did play the moonlight, and the firelight flickering through the gum-tree aisles. He gave the clash of the native weapons, and the almost supernatural suggestiveness of the uncanny melody. It was an aboriginal exorcism which Kaia sang, and this was how it went:

'Yūri dhàri ni!
 Yūri dhàri ni!
 Mùlli; mulla wànda bŭli.
 Bùнна kùnni! Bùнна Kùnni
 Kiràmi gùnman.
 Mäi-al inghil nùmma linni.
 Yūri dhàri ni!
 Bùnda wàhni! Bùnda Wàhni!
 Yùri dhàri ni!
 Yùmbù; yùmbù gùmil.
 Yūri dhàri ni! Yūri dhàri ni!
 Yùmbù; yùmbù gùmil.
 Yūri dhàri ni! Yūri dhàri ni!
 Dhūla ranja bŭrul.
 Yūri dhàri ni!'

Naturally, Kaia's song was Sanscrit, or Abracadabra, to the little crowd, and everybody wanted to know, later on, what it meant. Then Mr. Aldenning gave a rough translation of the queer ditty, which ran:

'A spirit as an emu hastens, hastens;
 Lays violent hold on travelling
 Much-exhausted stranger;
 Throws him down helpless.
 Jump, jump, Bùnda wàhni!
 Use your eyes!
 Hurl the straight spear,
 Yūri dhàri ni!'

—the refrain, Mr. Aldenning explained, being a mystic aboriginal formula for the expelling of evil spirits.

It was certainly a curious performance in its strange intonations and abrupt changes of mode and key. Most impressive, too, was it, from the dramatic intensity with which it was delivered. The musician's playing heightened the illusion, and imaginative persons among the audience might well have fancied that they heard the rush of emu wings; the fierce onslaught of the demon, the gasping struggle of the victim; and then, as the singer's voice swelled out 'Bunda wàhni! Bunda wàhni!' the excited call to arms of the exorcists, and following it the awesome refrain, 'Yūri dhàri ni!' which had an oddly thrilling effect as Kaia crooned it, crouching slightly forward, her arms swaying in rhythmic measure, her gaze fixed compellingly, as it were, upon some demoniac thing visible only to herself.

The effect was strangely moving. It was as though Kaia were overswept by the wild superstitions of her tribe, and shadowed by wraiths of warriors and witches from whom she had sprung. The dusky blood of her race mounted in her olive cheeks, and dyed her lips a red as deep as that of the hibiscus flower of her own native land; the brilliance of her eyes was extraordinary, and her very gestures had a barbaric subtlety. Indeed, it seemed that the traces of her Arruan ancestry, usually hardly noticeable, had suddenly sprung into prominence, and had imparted to her girlish beauty a new and exotic charm.

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No one in the room, perhaps, was more strongly impressed by the song and the girl than Dorothea Queste. As these wild cadences rose, she felt herself, in the same manner as when under other and different influence, thrilled by the sense of mystic powers. It was a sort of recurrence of

that experience which had taken place on the evening of her last meeting with Charafta, the occasion upon which she had first heard the name of Asphalion. But for this transcendent consciousness of power, momentary and elusive, yet never to be forgotten, the sensation was one already familiar to her—that of a veil lifted, or, rather, of a painted wall of matter dissolving to show other pictures, at once real and phantasmal, appearing first as in a glass darkly, then in vivid flashes which vanished before she could grasp their meaning.

The vision she now beheld was horrible. Could it have any relation to the radiant creature before her? And yet—yes. The truth was borne in irresistibly upon Dorothea that some inexplicable link of fate connected Kaia and herself with this lightning-revealed tragedy. She saw in that flash a girl who was not like Kaia, and who, nevertheless, she knew was Kaia—the ever-living self of Kaia—a beautiful, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, clothed in white robes which were blood-bespattered, and writhing under the hands of men who were dressed in the short tunics of Roman slaves. Something told her that they were Roman slaves, and besides, she recognised the dress from the Agrippina pictures she had seen, while a huge, cruel-looking Nubian cut out the girl's tongue.

An inward nausea overpowered Dorothea. Like the hero of George Eliot's eerie story 'The Lifted Veil,' she cursed her faculty of clear vision. But in a moment the picture had melted into nothingness, too rapidly for any impression of details or surroundings to remain, and the painted wall had closed in dense as ever. Opposite her old Lady Tregellis was clasping her skinny hands, and Alaric, standing like one in a dream, was gazing at Kaia. Dorothea pulled herself together, and realized that this was a party in the house of Pat O'Leary, the Progressivist member; that Roman slaves had no place in modern

London, and that the heiress Kaia Aldenning was going to be the sensation of the coming season, and that she ran no risk of having her tongue cut out by a bloodthirsty negro. What curious tricks, she said to herself, an artistic imagination might play upon its owner! But the thought came; if Charafta were here might he not convince her that once more she had been peering through the night of centuries into a dead yesterday?

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A short silence followed Kaia's song; then came a buzz of applause, and it seemed pretty certain that Kaia's Ugals would outbid in popularity Mrs. O'Leary's 'Coo-ēē' song. The musician was enchanted and triumphant. He knew that he had caught the inspiration, and he wanted no improvement upon his accompaniment. He again seized Kaia's hands.

'It is the Australian nightingale in dat leetle throat,' he cried. 'She is not taught, and she is a note that is differ from our nightingale; but I lofe it—dat nightingale; and this one have it too, and I lofe her as well.'

He loosed Kaia's left hand to pat that of Mrs. O'Leary.

'Ah, now you have seen and you have heard,' he went on, tossing back his shaggy locks. 'Haf I not said the truth? Can I not play the war and the ghosts, and the beating of your savage drums, and the shooting of your savage spears? But now we will have one Ugal that is good for this pretty little throat, for I can play love better than the war; and we will haf one Ugal of love.'

General acclamation hailed the proposal. Kaia stood irresolute, faintly protesting, pale, and a little tremulous. She was no longer possessed by the spirits of dead chiefs and medicine-men. She was only Kaia the stranger, who wondered how she had ever come to forget that she

stood in a London drawing-room, and how she had ever summoned courage to sing one of the songs of the Pass. Then, in her tremor and uncertainty, she turned her eyes haphazard towards the door, and Dorothea, who was watching her, saw a most curious change come over her face. A soft, shy blush crept up to her forehead, and her cheeks were rosy once more. And again her gaze seemed fixed beyond her audience, but this time there was no horror of the unseen object upon which it rested. Indeed, it was as though she had received with pleased submissiveness an inaudible command, for she made no further opposition. With her head slightly upraised, her gaze still nailed to that invisible point, and a dreamy unconsciousness of her surroundings stealing over her anew, she broke into her own wild language, and sang a love-song indescribably soft and wooing :

'Nuriyà ! Yuniyà ;
 Nunàina waria !
 Tanyàni ! Tanyàni !
 Niyà ninda kà-āia !
 Gùnyùngùn nà-ila ;
 Niyà ninda kà-āia !
 Miniyàgo yugila ?
 Gùnyùngùn nà-ila ;
 Niyà ninda kà-āia !—kà-āia !'

'Cease weeping ;
 Dearest, arise !
 Come to me,
 Thou art my love !
 We two belong to each other ;
 Thou art my love !
 Why weepest thou ?
 We two belong to each other ;
 Thou art my love—my love !'

Thus presently Mr. Aldenning translated.

No English girl could have sung that song as Kaia sang

it. Probably the performance would have seemed unmaidenly, but Kaia showed no consciousness of the passion breathed in every line. The emotion which transfigured her was that of scarcely awakened womanhood. Nevertheless, in the ear of some of her audience a caress inexpressibly tender lingered upon every intonation.

‘Niyà ninda kà-āia!’ That last word, almost her own name, and the word which in her native dialect meant love, seemed a kiss wafted to some invisible, perhaps impalpable, listener.

Could there in truth be a listener without, a listener of living flesh and blood to whom the young girl’s newly awakened heart was addressing itself? An unaccountable uneasiness came over Dorothea. Why this uncanny feeling of jealousy, of dislike towards Kaia, who had never done her a wrong? And why in that connection should her thoughts wander so persistently towards Sarel?

Under cover of the bravas which greeted Kaia’s song Dorothea moved her place so that her eyes now commanded the entrance door and passage beyond. Through a rift between Pat O’Leary’s burly form and that of Herbril, the Progressivist Whip, she saw a great figure towering in the shadow of the staircase, and gave a start of surprise as she recognised the Progressivist leader, Gavan Sarel.

Well, there was nothing so extraordinary in the fact that during a political crisis he should come to the house of his devoted follower, Pat O’Leary.

But why at this hour upon a festive occasion?—he who had never been known at a London evening party. Clearly, no social purpose had brought him. He was in morning dress, and his appearance gave somewhat a suggestion of preoccupation and hurry. It flashed across Dorothea that he had known she was to be here, and, desiring for some reason to speak to her, was waiting his opportunity. But, then, it had always been Sarel’s care to avoid any public

exhibition of their intimacy. The only explanation she could think of was, that he had been called away on sudden business, and that there was no time for him to avail himself later of the pass-key he possessed to her studio. She thought of the anonymous letters and of those incriminating documents of which he had spoken to her. But no! her quick intuition, which often made her realize a fact in defiance of her judgment, assured her that his mission was not to her. There was an expression upon his face which made her feel that an ocean lay between them—made her know that she had not even existence in his thoughts. It was with Kaia Aldenning that they were filled. Believing himself unobserved, he was gazing at the young girl with a delight in which there was none of their usual expression of cold mastery. He was absorbed in Kaia; she was a revelation to him, and he to her. Dorothea understood. That had been the meaning in Kaia's face. By a look, a smile, he had appealed to her, and his vague emotion had thrilled her untutored heart to a passionate response. Ah! had not Dorothea reason to know the magic of Sarel's smile?

Kaia stood as one entranced, heedless of the interest her song had excited, her dreamy eyes meeting those of Sarel in a sort of rapturous awe. And Sarel—never in her long experience of his moods had the elder woman seen such a look upon his face. It was as though his soul had for once pierced the mask of his features, as though by some undreamed-of spell he had been transformed from the master to the slave. Dorothea's master! Kaia's slave! Bitter was the pang. Now he seemed to awaken to a sense of the situation, and smiled again on the girl, giving her one of those magnetic looks, while he lightly touched his lip as though to enjoin silence. Then he moved back and was hidden from Dorothea.

She had the impulse to go out to him, to confront and

accuse him, but an instant's reflection convinced her of her madness. As she was trying for some pretext to leave her seat, she saw O'Leary turn sharply and then disappear into the passage, and she knew that somehow Sarel must have contrived to attract his attention. Presently O'Leary came back and whispered to the Progressivist Whip, who also withdrew into the passage, dexterously drawing together, as he did so, the folds of a tapestry curtain which partly veiled the doorway. Dorothea was, however, aware that after a moment or two he passed down the staircase with Sarel, while O'Leary returned to the drawing-room and went straight up to Mr. Aldenning.

Dorothea could no longer control her impatience. Soon a general movement had set in. Lady Tregellis and others were departing. Mr. Aldenning had his daughter on his arm. They, too, had bidden their host and hostess good-night. O'Leary hung on to them. Dorothea was near enough to hear what he said.

'It's the Chief himself come to give you and some of the rest of the boys his instructions. Sure, he doesn't let the grass of Palace Yard grow under his feet. He has got wind of the Dissolution, and a few of us will be off straight away on the scamper.'

'He wants me to go to Ireland immediately, I suppose,' said Aldenning.

'That's about it. First on the field is the Chief's motto.'

'And mine,' said Aldenning.

Kaia gave an eager little cry.

'Oh, Pà-pa, if it's settled that we're to shift camp and *yan*, you'll take me with you?'

'Of course I will, girlie. O'Leary, where's the Chief?'

'Down in my study waiting for you,' said O'Leary.

'And if ye'd sing that song for us on the hustings, Miss

Kaia, why, there's not a boy in Kilburra that 'ud have the heart to vote on the other side !'

Then the three went out together. Oh, wretched Dorothea ! Kaia, this strange girl from the wilds, admitted to the secret conference, taken into Sarel's confidence, while she, the woman who for seven years had reigned queen of his counsels and his heart, was left behind, dethroned, desolate !

Pat O'Leary's den was a gruesome chamber at the back of the house, littered with manuscripts, blue-books, and proof-sheets, and with two typewriters flanking the window, each now lighted by a gas-jet. It was evident from the look of the place that the journalist and his secretary had been at work up to the time when Pat had gone to dress for dinner. The Progressivist Whip seated himself on the secretary's desk. Sarel, now again his ordinary self—tall, powerful, and unemotional—stood by the mantelpiece, giving some business-like instructions. Upon this scene Kaia appeared, a radiant vision illuminating its dinginess. She entered in advance of her father and O'Leary, her face all alight in its excitement. But her eyes drooped at sight of Sarel, who advanced and took her hand. The Progressivist Whip sprang from his perch. He and Kaia were already friends.

'Here we are again, Miss Aldenning. Hooray for the fight ! Have you got your spear sharpened and the bumerangs ready ?'

'*Talla yan !*' cried the girl. 'That's what the blacks say when they're shifting camp for a corroboree. May I go ?' she asked meekly, turning to Sarel.

He looked down upon her from his great height—and she was of no mean stature—an indulgent smile lighting his still face.

'You should ask your father, not me.'

'But are you not the Chief ? Yes, it is you whom we

must obey.' Now, to the astonishment of them all, she made the prettiest gesture of fealty, touching her bowed forehead with the tips of her hands, and then, rearing herself like a young warrior, she spoke two words in the aboriginal dialect: '*Urumbūla Mahmi!* Do you know what that means?' she asked. 'Command me, O great one!'

Sarel responded by lifting the little brown hand to his lips, bowing before her as though he, too, were doing homage.

'*Urumbūla Mahmi!*' he repeated. 'I make my submission. Therefore, Princess, we are joint commanders in the Progressivist army. The Cause has good need of your woman's weapons.'

'Faith, and they'll knock down more of the enemy than all the boys' shillelaghs,' put in Pat O'Leary.

'Don't you let him make you nervous, Miss Aldenning, with his talk about shillelaghs,' said the Whip.

'Oh, she's safe in old Erin,' cried Pat; 'though Kilburra was an Orange quarter. If she'd sing her blacks' Ugal first and "God save Oireland" after it, there wouldn't be an Orangeman among them.'

'Now, if Miss Aldenning will excuse us, we must talk business for a few minutes,' said Sarel. He turned to Aldenning. 'Can you be ready to start by the mail-train to-morrow? The time is short, but the less of it lost, the better. It's going to be more of a contest than I fancied, and the Conservative candidate won't be many steamers behind you.'

'Kaia, go back to the hotel and begin your packing,' was Mr. Aldenning's answer. 'You'll put her into the carriage, O'Leary. I'll stop and settle things here.'

'All right,' said O'Leary. 'And mind, Princess, you pack some green ribbons in your trunk. Herbril's going along to show you the ropes,' he added to Aldenning,

indicating the Progressivist Whip. 'And maybe, if the *Torch* and my own constituency will spare me, I'll step over too and fire off a speech for you. And if ye know any pleasing young men that don't mind kissing babies and can pay compliments to the wives, why, I'd take them along too. There's Sebastian Blythe, now.'

'Pat!' It was Mrs. O'Leary's voice. She opened the door an inch or two. 'Everybody's going, and there's the whisky punch to be ladled, and Alaric Queste wants to speak to you.'

'That's a young man who'll do for the job,' said Mr. Aldenning.

Mrs. O'Leary opened the door wider.

'Goodness!' she exclaimed. 'A conference of the party, and Kaia in the middle of it!' She came in, shutting the door with the air of a conspirator when she perceived Sarel. 'What! You here, Chief? Then I know it's business, and I conclude the elections are coming on.'

'The elections are going to be on,' said Pat. 'And you must ladle out the whisky punch yourself, Kit, and keep our conference dark. And, I say, get somebody to take charge of Miss Kaia to the Hôtel Cecil, will you, and tell Alaric Queste he's wanted in here.'

'Good-night,' said Kaia. She nodded to the other men, but paused and held out her hand to Sarel. 'Good-night, Chief.'

'Good-night, Princess,' said he.

'Are you coming to Kilburra?' she asked.

'Not this time,' he answered. 'You see, we're only stealing a march on the enemy just now. Our battle doesn't begin till the writs are out. That means,' he added, seeing her puzzled look, 'till we all cease to be members of Parliament, and are nominated afresh to our own or other constituencies.'

'Then we are to come back and go over again?'

‘That will depend on how you find Kilburra,’ said he. ‘Perhaps you may want to stop there all the time.’

‘Remember, Chief,’ said Kaia, waxing bold, ‘you have said the words *Urumbūla Mahmi!*’

‘*Urumbūla Mahmi!*’ he repeated, in a lower tone, and went forward to open the door for her. As she passed through, he said : ‘I understand what that means, Princess. Command me, O great one! It is your command that I come and fight beside you in your father’s battle?’

‘It is my command, Chief.’

‘Then I shall obey the command.’

‘And I,’ she answered, ‘will come to your battle and fight by your side if you wish it. We are of the same army, Chief.’

And he wondered in grim humour what Dorothea Queste would say to that arrangement, and also what his constituents would say, and what all the world, which looked upon him as a misogynist, would say. And he pictured to himself the sensation that would be were this beautiful young heiress to show herself boldly at his side on his electioneering platform. Well, it would only be said that he had found at last the one wife for whom, according to popular opinion, he had been waiting all these years, and for whose sake he was supposed to have eschewed the delights of womanhood.

INTERLUDE

NEXT day the news that Parliament would be dissolved had spread all over England, and presently the light in the Clock Tower was extinguished, and silence held the Terrace at Westminster.

London seemed strangely deserted. All who had anything to do with politics were out of town, and those who were not canvassing and contesting constituencies on their own account were helping their friends to do so. It seemed to Dorothea in that preparatory interval between the Dissolution and the full cry of the elections that almost everyone she was interested in had gone to Ireland. Ravage was for the time at his own place there—not for canvassing; he sat for an English constituency, and his would be an easy victory, for he had been returned in too many elections unopposed for a contest to be now likely. The short stay in that quiet old castle by the shores of the Atlantic which he made, with his sister for a companion, was for him a lull in more active work, a brief period of preparation for the stormy meetings he was to hold and the great speeches he was to make in important centres, for which the country was anxiously waiting. From him Dorothea, working hard in her studio in Chelsea, heard frequently; from Sarel scarcely at all. Sarel, too, she vaguely understood, had gone to Ireland, not on his own business—he, too, sat for an English borough—but to attend meetings in the South in aid of Pat O’Leary, who was likely to have a hard fight for his seat. To Dorothea

there was arid comfort in the reflection that Kilburra lay in North Ulster, and that, according to Alaric's latest report, the Aldennings were returning to London for a short time before the final struggle. There would hardly be opportunity for any meeting between Sarel and Kaia; and in the meantime Alaric was in the field, and his wooing must surely be prospering, for otherwise his letters would not be written in so lighthearted a vein.

Certainly, anyone seeing the two together would have come to that conclusion; indeed, they appeared to be on such excellent terms with one another that it was generally understood in Kilburra they were engaged to be married. A good deal of the lighter sort of canvassing fell to their share, and Pat O'Leary was proved right in his conjecture that Kaia's womanly wiles did quite as much service as the heavier guns of the detachment, efficacious as these certainly were.

Even Sebastian Blythe was found to be invaluable in tackling a certain type of local man of which Horace Aldenning had had small experience.

But the Party was beginning to see that in Aldenning it had a most promising recruit. Whatever his taciturnity in private life, he showed a remarkable faculty for public speaking, and took as well with the mob as Pat O'Leary, who, according to his promise, had spent a night at Kilburra and fired off an oration. Aldenning showed a blunt humour, which had developed in the course of varied dealings with pearlers and trading folk of divers nationalities. Perhaps South Sea pearlers and trading captains do not differ so widely from Irish fishers when approached on broadly human lines. The sea is a rare solvent of prejudices, and Aldenning had been a seaman before he became a millionaire. Anyhow, these people loved the queer tales of South Sea skippers, and missionaries, and beachcombers, and Irish settlers in the Antipodes, and wily Chinamen,

and so forth, with which he illustrated his political principles. As regards his political creed, the main points being satisfactorily explained—such as a revival of Home Rule in the near future, impartial condemnation of landlords and oppressors, and a vague but emphatic declaration in favour of democratic reform—the voters of Kilburra did not trouble themselves much about the New Guinea Concession Scheme or the question of Imperial policy in the East.

Nor did Kaia, either, feel much concern over these national considerations. It was the joy of life which carried her irresponsibly along. She revelled in the novelty of her present experiences; she delighted in queening it at Kilburra; she found immense pleasure in making herself beloved by these impulsive folk. And then, underlying all this, was the scarcely acknowledged happiness of marching under the banner and the leadership of her chosen chief. But, frank as she had been in offering her fealty, she did not speak often of Gavan Sarel. Already she was becoming less of a savage; the woman-sense was growing, while still she remained a Nature-being. And, in truth, the world seemed to her a vast playground, filled with intoxicating pleasures and charming companions, whose main object appeared to be adulation of herself. Like a child let loose in a raree-show, she was half bewildered, but enchanted with everything.

Truly, there was something pathetic in the perfect trust and the enjoyment of this young creature. It seemed too pitiful a prospect that sorrow and disillusion should come to her, as come they must in all human lives. How could she bear suffering, this brilliant tropical flower, who had never in her existence heard a harsh word or known a grief, save that of losing her mother, and softened regret over the misfortunes of her friends the pearlers? She believed in everyone, she liked everyone—more or less. Sebastian

Blythe came under the latter category, though her feeling for him was not active, and merely took the form of an instinctive shrinking from any confidential communication.

With Alaric Queste she was utterly confidential, and she made no secret of her friendly attachment to the young artist. Her very frankness might have warned him not to cherish too ambitious hopes. Girls who are in love are more ready to conceal than to blazon forth their partiality. Indeed, Alaric did sometimes feel a doubt of this kind. But, then, he told himself that Kaia was quite unlike any other girl that had ever been born, and could not be judged by ordinary canons. Her character was elemental, and she had inherited from her mother the traditional unreserve of the South Sea maiden. Thus he reasoned and was reassured. He had not as yet confessed his love, but had gone very near to an avowal.

Opportunity was not lacking. He and Kaia seemed to be thrown almost of design into each other's company. They sat side by side on the platforms; it was always he who piloted her through crowds; it was he who took her for walks on the Kilburra cliffs, and gave her sketching lessons on afternoons when the hotel was stuffy and noisy, when the reporter and local man abounded, and when there was no particular canvassing to be done; or when the Conservative candidate was having his innings, and it was thought desirable that the rival crowds should not meet, so that the Progressivist party transacted its business indoors.

Sebastian Blythe did not interfere in the intimacy between these two young people, though occasionally, for reasons of his own, he wondered whether it might not be wise that he should do so. But Sebastian had acute perceptions in some matters, and a lynx-like faculty of observation. The episode of Gavan Sarel's appearance in the shadow of the stairway at the O'Learys' party had not

passed unnoticed by him. He had seen the expression on Sarel's face ; he had been struck by Kaia's demeanour. He had watched, too, with triumphant satisfaction the bravely-concealed agony of poor Dorothea. Remembering these things, he did not think that there was at present any likelihood of Kaia's accepting Alaric.

Sebastian was social organizer for the party. He was Mr. Aldenning's secretary, and the authorized intermediary between the candidate and the press. He had his time too well filled up to be able to dance attendance on Kaia. Notwithstanding his reported susceptibility to feminine charms, those of Kaia did not greatly appeal to him. Moreover, he was preoccupied by his adoration of other charms more mature, and by illusive visions of romantic possibilities. How had Sebastian Blythe become aware of the fatal illness of Dorothea's husband in Baziria? No one but himself could answer that question. How, too, had he got to know of those midnight entrances by the models' door to the studio at Chelsea? Had he, too, a pass-key? If so, it must be a forged one. Nevertheless, Sebastian did know these secrets, and he knew, too, that his only chance of winning Dorothea lay in the reactionary pique of a scorned woman.

SCENES

It was the end of the introductory campaign. Kaia and Alaric had been left pretty well to their own devices on this last day at Kilburra. There had been a conference of the supporters, lasting till late afternoon ; there was to be an early semi-political dinner, and afterwards Mr. Aldenning was to address the multitude. Alaric had cried off both meeting and dinner. Just now he was sketching Kaia, and his mood was wholly artistic.

Kaia was writing letters, or making a pretence thereof. She sat before the fire with a blotting-pad on her knees, her face sometimes raised, sometimes bent; her expression continually changing, her attitude always graceful. Alaric, watching her, and seizing his opportunities, was making a series of rapid studies, rejecting some, dealing more carefully with others.

At this moment Kaia's face was sad with the April sadness of a stricken child. Two tears trembled on the dark lashes. Alaric saw them gather; they were a child's tears, soft and pearly, which did not redden her eyes nor scald the lids. How Alaric longed that he might kiss away those sweet drops! Presently one fell on the papers where she had written three lines in her straggling, unformed hand. Alaric uttered a half-humorous cry of dismay, and she, looking up at the sound and meeting his eyes, laughed through her sorrow.

'You shouldn't do that,' he said. 'I can see that writing a letter is a very serious piece of work to you; it's as bad as starting an etching might have been to Rembrandt. Now, when you cry over the work, it makes unnecessary difficulties. Even Rembrandt would have been discouraged, and put off his food, if he had dropped tears on a beautiful new bit of copper. He'd have waited to begin his etching till he had got over his crying.'

'I can't help it,' said Kaia; 'it's the letter that makes me cry. I'm writing to the widow of one of my pearlers. I told you there had been a cyclone in the Straits, and that the fleet had been nearly all destroyed.'

'Don't you think,' suggested Alaric, 'that if you wait till your father has been elected member for Kilburra, that piece of news will be consolation to the widow?'

'Yes, it will,' said Kaia, brightening; 'it's a good thought. I will write to Lewra instead.' She put aside the sheet and took another, on which she proceeded to

trace a word or two in a careful round handwriting. 'I'm obliged to make the writing very plain,' she said. 'You know, Lewra is a half-caste, and she is not accustomed to getting letters from white people.'

Alaric looked with interest at the beginning of the letter, which she held for him to see.

'That's very nice,' he remarked. 'I like it better than the other; it's more decorative.' He went on, though there was suppressed emotion beneath the chatter, for the mere joy of watching her face as he drew her thoughts away from the drowned pearlers: 'A letter ought to be artistic, don't you think? just as much so as a dress or a lampshade, or the colour of a wall, or anything else that's part of your life. A letter should have a beautiful margin—yours isn't half broad enough—and plenty of semi-colons.'

'But you can't put semicolons everywhere,' objected Kaia. 'The storekeeper explained that to me.'

'Perhaps not recklessly—together,' admitted Alaric. 'But a semicolon carefully placed—the two little marks in the right quality of ink—that's a decorative object. Of course, from the literary point of view, I give up semi-colons. Why worry about that? I believe there are people in London who for thirty shillings a week will regulate commas and semicolons. They are not artists.'

Kaia wrote laboriously. Alaric went on with his drawing. Kaia's face just then was an inspiration. Alaric felt that these studies were an expression of his love; he could never refrain from drawing Kaia under all sorts of conditions. Presently he saw that she was worried, and that ideas had ceased to flow. Her brow puckered in perplexity.

'I can't write to Lewra to-day,' she said; 'there are no messengers.'

'No messengers!' repeated Alaric.

‘The walls shut them out, and, as you would say, Mr. Queste, they are not in the atmosphere. To-morrow morning early I shall go out on the cliff, and I will call the messengers from the Pass. I shall call them in their own language. Then, as I write, they will follow my thoughts and carry them over the sea, and when Lewra reads my letters they will make her understand all that there’s no use in trying to put into words.’

‘That’s a quaint fancy, Highness. I like it. What sort of messengers do you mean?’

The mock title had been generally adopted in the circle of Kaia’s intimate friends and admirers since the Chief had done homage to her as Princess.

‘I don’t think it is a fancy,’ said Kaia. ‘Mà-ma believed it was true. She used to say that there must always be messengers to carry the thoughts of blacks to whites, and of whites to blacks, and that without the messengers there could be no real understanding. I am sure it is true of blacks,’ she added; ‘and I think it must be true for white people as well—for those who are friends, and whose unspoken thoughts pass from one to the other.’

‘We are friends,’ said Alaric.

‘Yes, *we* are friends,’ replied Kaia frankly; ‘and it’s possible that we have our messengers going from one to the other, and making our souls understand each other. But this I do not know. I am not like Mà-ma. I have not the Vision.’

‘Your mother could see the messengers?’ asked Alaric.

‘Yes, Mà-ma could see them, but not always. She could only see for her own people, and for the whites that she loved. Mà-ma was very strange.’

‘The messengers are spirits, then?’

‘Oh, of course; not ghosts, but spirits. There are different kinds of messengers. There are the water-spirits and

the land-spirits, and those that dwell in caves. These are the Tambóra. Then there are sometimes the Kinirkihir, which are the Wùndas—the spirits of the dead. I don't mean the ordinary dead, but the Wùnda of the Mate, if the Mate happened to be dead.'

'I don't quite follow that, Highness.'

'Oh, it is very simple when it is explained. Mà-ma understood it all.'

'Will you not explain it to me, Highness?'

Kaia waited a moment, then went on:

'Mà-ma used to say that in the Beginning the Great Spirit made man and woman not two, but one; and that afterwards, when their Wùndas were separated—and I don't know why they were separated; that is a mystery, and it is a long time ago—but Mà-ma said that though they were separated they could never be wholly parted; the Wùnda of each must come back to earth again and again, and seek and find the other till they were joined for ever once more. That will be at the end of the world.'

'It is a beautiful idea, Highness, but it is not new; and it is not peculiar to the South Seas. I have read that the Greeks and other nations held the same belief.'

'I don't know anything about that,' answered Kaia. 'It was Mà-ma's idea. She used to say, too, that each Wùnda has its own friends among the land-spirits, and the water-spirits, and the rest, who become its guardians and messengers when it returns to earth. Mà-ma always said that Pà-pa's Wùnda must have been a great chief once in her island, and that she had been his wife, and that this was the reason why, when he was born a white, he loved her, and went to her island and carried her away.'

'Highness,' said Alaric, 'our spirits, too, must have

known each other in long past days. I am sure of it, because we have become friends in so short a time, because I understand you, because I feel as I do towards you. And I firmly believe that there are messengers passing between you and me every moment that we are together, and when we are apart as well, for then I am always thinking of you—messengers interpreting our thoughts to each other, and making a link between your soul and mine.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Kaia, looking puzzled and a little troubled; ‘I do not know, for I am not like Mā-ma; I have not the Eyes to see. It is possible that you have been my brother, as you say, in the long past. I cannot tell.’

‘Or maybe something nearer than a brother,’ ventured Alaric; and his voice was troubled and his face was changed from the face of that Alaric even whom his mother knew. ‘And all these years,’ he went on, a little tremble in his voice—‘all these years when I have cared for nothing but the Work, and have never thought of a woman, except my mother—why, it was because my Wūnda, as you call it, was waiting to meet yours, Kaia. You are not angry with me for saying Kaia; it is such a beautiful word. It was waiting to meet yours, which was to be my inspiration, to set me on the right track in art, and in everything else; to bring out whatever is best and greatest in me. Yes, all these years, Kaia, I have been waiting for you.’

‘All these years,’ repeated Kaia; and as she laughed her child’s laugh the vague worry passed from her face. ‘You talk as if you were an old man, Mr. Queste. And your mother looks as young as Kit O’Leary, and is ever so much more beautiful; and your age really can’t be so very much more than mine.’

‘You are nearly eighteen,’ replied Alaric, ‘and I am

twenty-three. As for my mother, she is one of those women who remain beautiful when they are ninety. Artists are like the immortal gods, Highness: they can never grow old, and they are never young. Let me tell you that though I may seem boyish, and rather frivolous on the outside, I am not so in reality. I have never been young, for the burden of the Work has always been on me. Years have nothing to do with the matter. It is the soul within which makes a man young or old. And to think that till I knew you I hardly believed in the soul!

'You did not believe in the soul?' said Kaia. 'What was your religion, then?'

'My mother declares that she has made me a Pagan, and that is true. But there were Pagans to whom the soul was an important fact, just as there were other Pagans who had no religion but the worship of art and beauty and the joy of life. My mother must be of the first kind. You interpret her to me. Till now I have been of the last. If she is a Platonist, then I was an Epicurean.'

Kaia's face had an expression of amused bewilderment.

'*Bel me pidney*,' said she with the quaint smile which, when they were intentional, heralded her blacks' phrases.

She was a daughter of Eve after all, this Arruan girl; and she had been quick to perceive that there was a fascination for her hearers in those odd exclamations of hers, no longer so unconscious as at the beginning.

'I don't know anything about those people,' she said. And in truth the storekeeper at the Pass had not carried her education as far as the Greek philosophers.

'Why should you know—you who are yourself the knowledge and the inspiration?' said Alaric fervently. 'You, who were reared and taught inside the gates of Nature, which you are now unlocking for me. For this is

so, Kaia,' he went on more fervently still. 'You are teaching me what my mother has always told me I must learn before I can be a true artist. My mother was right. I think she, too, in her way must have what you call the Eyes to see.'

He got up in his excitement and paced the little parlour, while at that moment there swelled in the street outside the sound of a procession and of a demonstration in favour of the Conservative candidate which almost drowned his words. But Alaric paid no attention to the braying of the band and the shouts of the mob.

'No,' he cried, 'the Work isn't all technique and pigment and medium. Nature is something more to the Artist than a flat screen. There's a whole invisible world behind the painted screen which he must show through it, or he is no artist. Yes, I know it now. Oh, I'd like to cancel my exhibition—I would indeed—and begin all over again, embodying in the Work what you have taught me.'

'But you are an artist already, Mr. Queste. Everyone says you are a very clever artist, and how could I teach you anything—I, who am so stupid and so ignorant?'

'I wish you'd call me Alaric, or else Ral,' he interrupted; 'it's so much more natural.'

'Yes, it is more natural,' assented Kaia simply; 'but all the same, Alaric, it is absurd to talk of my teaching you anything. You don't approve of my sort of art. You said the other day, when we were sketching, that my drawing was all wrong.'

'So it is, and so is the Egyptian picture-writing; but it's art all the time. When your father lets me give you lessons in my own studio, and I can show you things properly, you'll see that I shan't find such fault with your Art. Then, when we're in the atmosphere, you'll

begin to understand what you're doing for me—what you've done already.' He stopped in front of her. 'I'm going to begin all over again,' he said. 'I'm going to work on a different method. I'm going to see with new eyes. I'm going to paint a great picture. Oh, if I could paint you, Kaia, as you will look when you stand upon Kilburra Cliff to-morrow! with your arms outstretched over the sea, and your eyes shining, and your sweet voice calling——'

'You couldn't paint my voice, Alaric.'

'Yes, I could, and I would. I would make it understood somehow that you were calling, in their own language, to the wild spirits of the Pass—the spirits of waving palms and magnolia-trees, of tropical sunsets and purple waves—that's where the art would come in. And I'd show the spirits themselves to the eyes that could see—cloud shapes hovering round you and one with you—forms graceful and free and lovely and splendid-hued as you are; yet to those who had not the Eyes, only clouds. I should see the spirit-forms, I should know them as they are, and so I should be able to paint them as they are. For my eyes are opened now, Kaia—opened by my love for you.'

Carried away, partly by his feeling for the girl, partly by artistic enthusiasm—and verily in Alaric's nature these two sentiments had much correspondence—the young man threw himself on the hearthrug at Kaia's feet, and, while he gazed ardently up at her, took her hand in his. Though she suffered her hand to remain in his clasp, Kaia moved slightly, and the blotting-pad, with her attempts at letters, fell to the ground. Alaric picked up the sheet which had the three lines scrawled upon it and the big tear-drop blistering its surface, and put the round mark to his lips; then he folded up the sheet and deliberately placed it in his pocket.

‘I kiss your tear,’ he said. ‘I carry it next my heart. If only I had the right to kiss away all tears that might ever gather in your eyes, oh, Kaia! you would never weep!’

Who could have believed, except, perhaps, his mother, that love would speak so eloquently through Alaric’s lips? His audacity might have gone further, but for the faint virginal alarm on Kaia’s face. No man had ever before spoken to her burning words of this kind. They startled her, yet she hardly grasped their real meaning. All relations between man and woman, save that between father and child, were strange to Kaia. Whatever courtships there might have been on the Pass, were beyond her ken. Of the ways of young men and maidens she had absolutely no experience. She had never had a brother; it would have been impossible for her to define the intimacies of even that relation. For this reason she could not, though she had frequently tried, have analyzed her feeling towards Alaric Queste. There is but one feeling of man for woman, and of woman for man, which is beyond analysis, and does not need to be defined, which is unmistakable, illuminating as the glory of the rising sun turning twilight into day. Had the dawn of that sun shone yet upon Kaia? Had the voice sounded which should awaken the maiden’s sleeping heart? She could not tell. This only she knew, that not to Alaric had she sung ‘Nìyà ninda kà-āia—kà-āia!’

She shrank back still further, now withdrawing her hand gently from his. He, too, shrank, rebuked by her clear gaze, which seemed an unconscious question.

‘Kaia,’ he said, ‘I feel that the time has not yet come for me to explain myself fully. You are a child still. You don’t know what love really means. You are like a rosebud with its outer leaves folded, and it

would be folly to try and force the moment of bloom. A little while, and the petals will unroll softly and beautifully, and then the wind may tell its own story, and the rose will listen and understand. I will wait patiently for that moment. I shall watch for the petals to unfold, and then—then—ah, Kaia! don't be angry with me for my presumption—I shall dare everything then. I shall defy all the barriers. I shall scorn the fact that you are a great heiress, and the most beautiful woman in the world, who might marry a prince or a duke if she pleased. I shall think of nothing but that I love you; and I warn you, Kaia—I shall put all my will into it—I shall make you love me.'

Kaia laughed, and the tinkling tone seemed to him as passionless as might be those of the Nature-spirits she had been describing. She was interested and amused, and the idea of marrying Alaric, or of marrying anyone, just then appeared so far off and so unnatural that she could not take him seriously. And yet underneath the interest and amusement lay something deep and solemn, and as yet unfathomed. The talk about her mother had made her conscious of a thrilling in those lower depths, and this was not the first time she had been stirred of late. She shrank from the discovery. She did not want to analyze her feeling towards Alaric or his feeling for her; she was a little afraid of both, and more afraid of another feeling in herself too indefinite to shape even into thought. She turned off Alaric's declaration with a laugh.

'*Pialla naia nanti!*' she said, in aboriginal dialect. 'Do you know what that means? The blacks say when they are puzzled, and don't want to go on any further, "Tell me name!" There are so many different kinds of love. I've one kind for Pà-pa, and another for you, and another for—for other people. Don't you think

one is stupid to make a fuss before you know which kind it is? *Pialla naia nanti!*

‘Kaia, there’s one way of knowing. If you really loved anyone, there’d be no possibility of mistake.’ He came closer, and almost whispered in her ear: ‘Could you—would you let me kiss you, Kaia?’

And now he knew that he had roused the dormant sense in her, and exulted in the fancy that it was he who had awakened it. A wave of crimson swept the girl’s face. She lifted her hands, which were playing in an embarrassed manner with her pearl chain, as though to hide the blush, and the pearls glistened against her cheek.

‘Oh no—no!’ she cried.

‘Why, Kaia—dearest Kaia?’

‘That’s quite different.’

‘It only seems different because you don’t understand yourself, any more than you understand life or men. Oh, Kaia! I think of you as of some wonderful nature-being, half-fairy, half-woman, to whom the living human forces are as yet a mystery. It is beautiful, it is glorious, to know that there can be such a woman. Kaia, love is the greatest of all human forces. Already it has transformed me. Do you not realize this? Do you not feel that force going forth now from me to you?’

‘I do feel that you care for me.’

‘And that force which is so powerful in me must influence you, Kaia. It must make you love me in return. You believe in me, don’t you, Kaia?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘You believe that I am strong in my determination to be an artist, and in my determination to accomplish other things?’

‘Yes.’

‘If I were not strong, I should not be able to feel this

intense love for you ; I should not dare to love you. But though I'm your slave, Highness, I have confidence in my own will. Always, when I have said to myself, "I will do that thing," then somehow I have done the thing. It is true that I have not hitherto set my heart on tremendous things such as this. What I have wanted has been to succeed in the Work, to make friends of people, to win prizes, and so forth ; but, big or little, I have done the things. And so I am certain that I shall do this into which I have put my will and my strength and my soul. From the first moment that your eyes looked into mine, Kaia, you were a revelation to me of what was in myself, of what was in art, and in life—everything. You have opened out new and splendid vistas before me. I shall go back to my studio, and I shall paint and paint until I get what I am aiming at. I shall steep myself in Art, and in you, for you are Art to me. I shall paint that picture of you. It shall not be a slavish portrait, and yet it shall be more truly you than any ordinary portrait could be. Real and Ideal blended, it shall have in it all that my work has missed, and that you will have given me. Should I not love you, even if it were only for that? Should I not take that as a sign from the invisible powers which your mother believed in, that our spirits are one ?

'I don't know, Alaric.'

She could not help being impressed by his passion, his courage, his determination. But of herself she was uncertain.

'You will know and believe when you see. I am not afraid. In the meantime, don't think that I am going to tease and trouble you. I know better than to tear open the rosebud. I'll be your brother again, if that is what you like best.'

'Oh yes,' she exclaimed, relieved, and happy once more ; 'that will be much the best. I like your being my brother

immensely, Alaric, and we won't say anything more about the other thing.'

With something of compunction, even of wounded vanity, he saw that her mind was relieved of a weight.

She gave him a smile which in its friendliness was not altogether balm to his wounded heart. She was ready and pleased to dismiss the subject, to regard the episode as closed. She stooped and gathered up her papers that were fluttering about the hearthrug, and laid them on the table, and then put some more wood on the fire, in which operation he assisted her. Then, to recover his calm, he turned to the window and opened it, letting in the crisp evening air.

The night was clear, and for early March unusually mild. Outside, the lamps were alight, contrasting with the brilliant stars and a young moon. The open space was a sea of heads. A mass of people had collected, for, after the dinner, Mr. Aldenning was to speak from the balcony that ran along from beyond Kaia's sitting-room by the large parlour which was the common reception and meeting room of the electioneering party.

It had been arranged that Kaia should hear the speech from her own window. Thence, she commanded a side-view of the balcony. Alaric placed an arm-chair by the window, and threw over it an opossum-rug he had taken from the sofa. Down below, the noise of the crowd was intensifying. Clearly the time for the oration was at hand.

'I think you had better get ready,' he said. 'And, Highness, I'd put on something warm, if I were you. You mustn't catch cold this last evening.'

Kaia went into the room adjoining, and presently came forth, her head and form enveloped in a sable-trimmed cloak and hood which had been one of the Parisian extravagances.

The band now blared forth 'God save Ireland,' and just then Sebastian Blythe opened the door.

'They're going to begin, Miss Aldenning. Your father sent me to tell you that, when it's over, you'll do best to stay in here till he comes for you. The other room is full of reporters and supporters and the rest. And there's tremendous excitement, for, what do you think?—the Chief has just turned up.'

'The Chief?' repeated Kaia.

'The Chief and O'Leary. They are due at Derry to-morrow, where there's to be a big meeting, and they've come round here on the way. It's a grand send-off for us. Why, you're almost in the dark!'

Sebastian turned on the centre gas-jets, and shed an illumination in the room, revealing the suppressed excitement upon Alaric's face, and the traces of Kaia's maidenly confusion. He was not slow in observing these, and in forming his own conclusions; for in Kaia's eyes was the same dreamy radiance as when she had sung 'Niyà ninda kà-āia.'

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And, in truth, during the hour or so that followed, while the speeches were going on, Kaia sat as one in a dream. The dimly-lighted square and sea of upturned faces, the cheering of the mob, the strains of the band, and her father's sonorous tones, were a bewildering part of the dream. She could not have told anyone what the speeches were about. One man one vote; womanhood suffrage; the abolition of hereditary aristocracy; government for the people and by the people—what was it all to her? Just so many jingling phrases!

Only a few sentences stood out distinctly, and they were not spoken in her father's Australianized accents or Pat O'Leary's brogue, but in a voice deep, rich, masterful,

with that indefinable ring of power which made it the voice of a popular idol. Yet Sarel stood cold, indifferent, apparently, to the wild enthusiasm which at every pause broke forth in the mob below.

Some things he said in praise of her father, and these Kaia understood, and they sounded sweetly in her ear. Other things, too, he said, which she did not understand, but which thrilled her as the inspired utterance of a god.

'You cannot fight against the Future. And the great human Forces marching on in their majesty and their might must sweep away the tyranny of conventions. . . .'

Those were some of the words which lingered. The great human Forces! Had not Alaric told her that love was the greatest of all human forces—Love marching on in its majesty and its might. . . .

And in Kaia's heart this was the refrain of Gavan Sarel's political peroration. She had a side-view of him at her father's right, standing with arms folded, stately, pallid, the self-restrained face, with its slightly beaked nose, its firmly curved lips, its eagle brow, reminding her of the statue of an orator she had seen in one of the galleries they had visited on their way from Brindisi to England.

Kaia was alone. She had begged Alaric to leave her and take his place with the supporters, and had bidden him not return till her father came for her. When the speechmaking was over, and the crowd had noisily scattered, she sat at the window still in a dream. She could hear the buzz of talk in the adjoining room, Pat O'Leary's mellow tones distinguishable, and her father's strident voice, while every now and then there was a brief, deep note and cadence. Evidently the party was relating its electioneering experiences to the Chief.

By-and-by the door opened and her father came in,

followed by a tall form that for a moment blocked the doorway.

'Girlie, I've brought the Chief to have a word with you.'

Sarel stepped forward and took Kaia's hand. The girl had risen and was standing near the chandelier, her face glowing from out the shadow of her hood as the light struck it.

'*Urumbūla Mahmi!*' said Sarel. 'I have not forgotten.'

But all Kaia's pretty wilfulness and her aboriginal airs and graces seemed to have fled from her. She had nothing to say to him except with her eyes, and her little brown hand trembled in his like a frightened bird.

'Girlie,' said her father, 'should you like a moonlight walk? Alaric says you haven't been out to-day. It will do us both good. I want a bit of a sea-breeze to clear the electioneering heat out of my brain.'

Kaia hesitated. She looked to Sarel.

'We are going to walk along the cliffs to my hotel. Come,' he said.

She followed at his bidding as obediently as a huge setter dog which he unleashed in the hall. He led the beast by a chain, explaining that he was fond of dogs, and that this was a recent gift from one of O'Leary's constituents.

The three—Aldenning, Sarel, and Kaia, with the dog—left the hotel by its back-entrance, Pat O'Leary and Herbril, the Whip, lingering, deep in political conference. They gained the cliff by a quiet street leading towards the sea. The street was as still as though there had never been a mass meeting in the square, which was not many hundred yards away. Only a few belated wayfarers passing along recognised the Chief's towering figure, and stopped to look after him as they said to each other, 'Why, sure it's himself! It's Mr. Sarel!'

Kaia scarcely spoke to Sarel. Every now and then, however, she was conscious that his eyes were bent down upon her, and when she stumbled over a stone in the deceptive light, he said, 'Take my arm,' and, without waiting for a yea or nay, put down his left hand and clasped hers, as though he were leading a child. That guiding clasp gave Kaia a curious sensation of happiness and well-being; it was better than if he had talked to her. All the time he was exchanging short, pointed remarks with Mr. Aldenning upon the attitude of the Kilburra voters and upon the prospects of the election. It was not long before they reached the hotel—a gaunt building away from the town and overlooking the sea.

'I always come here,' said Sarel. 'It's out of the bustle; and I'm something of a hermit, you know. Besides, I enjoy a good sunrise, and you get splendid ones from those windows.'

They paused at the garden-gate.

'You won't come in? No, of course, it's too late for Miss Aldenning. Good-night, Highness.'

'Good-night, Chief.'

The dog barked and pulled at his chain.

'Quiet, Wulf!' said Sarel.

Kaia patted the creature, which licked her hand—the one Sarel had held.

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The sun was rising, a red disc out of the sea, when Kaia, wrapped in her long cloak, stole softly out of the hotel by its back-door, and then, avoiding the street, by a winding path to the sands. She did not take the upper road by the cliff along which she had walked with Sarel the night before. Often in London this wild girl of the woods and reefs had felt a craving for ocean's breath and for the music of the wind among palms and breadfruit-trees.

There were no bread-fruit-trees here at Kilburra, and the cliffs were bald, as though the turf had been close shorn, while the sea-breeze was rudely boisterous and struck with a Northern chill ; but it smelled sweet and free, and Kaia's yearning was satisfied.

This vague longing for the balmy South was Kaia's one drawback to her enjoyment of the new life. So, almost every fine dawn of those days at Kilburra had seen the girl go forth on her pilgrimage that she might make her morning orison at the shrine of her own wild gods. There was much of the savage yet in Kaia, and this instinct towards solitude on such occasions was part of her barbarian inheritance. Once Alaric, having discovered her habit, had followed her, but had been sternly commanded to return, and he had not ventured again to obtrude his company upon her in these early rambles.

She sat now in the light of the risen sun upon a projecting boulder, the hood of her cloak fallen back from her auburn-flecked hair, which seemed to have caught the full morning glory, while she folded up and placed in her pocket the little letter in roundhand that she had been scribbling to Lewra, the half-caste.

Gavan Sarel, as he rounded the boulder, came upon her with no preparation but Wulf's bark. Kaia, startled, rose to her feet, and the dog fawned against her knees.

‘Good Wulf!’ she cried. Then, as he jumped in excitement, pawing her dress and barking the while, she battled with him playfully. ‘Down, Wulf! Quiet, Wulf!’

‘He won't hurt you,’ said Sarel, lifting his hat and holding out his hand. ‘Good-morning, Highness.’

‘Good-morning, Chief.’

Neither commented upon the other's appearance at so unwonted an hour in this lonely place ; it seemed perfectly natural that they should thus meet.

Kaia's cheeks were softly flushed, and her eyes glowed like phosphorescent waves on a tropical night. Sarel looked down upon her from his great height. His own eyes shone, and his face was moved out of its usual mask-like stillness.

'We are of the same faith,' he said. 'We say our prayers to the rising sun.'

She smiled comprehension.

'And we are fellow star-worshippers. I watched you at your window last night when the meeting was over, and your face was uplifted to the starlit sky as though you were searching there—searching for some edict of fate.'

'I was looking for my star,' said Kaia.

'Your star! Then you, too, have a star which rules your destiny?'

'Mà-ma showed it to me,' answered Kaia. 'My Mà-ma could read the heavens, and she knew by my star that I should come to the White Land across the Great Water.'

'Your mother foretold your future?'

'No, only that much of it. Mà-ma used to say that the Great Spirit will not allow mothers to know all that is going to befall their children.'

'There is reason in that. And yet for you, Princess, the auspices could only be fortuitous. But, surely, your own star was not to be found in these Northern skies?'

'You see that I have followed it across the Great Water,' said Kaia simply. 'It shines both here and over the Pass.'

'Some evening, Princess, when you and I are standing together on the Terrace of the House of Commons, which is a beautiful place for star-gazing, you shall show me your star, and I will point you out mine.'

'Ah, my star is a poor little, dim, far-away thing!' she said. 'You couldn't make it out except on a very clear night; it's only a girl's star, pale and feeble.'

'And mine is a man's star, strong and distinct and golden.'

'I will tell you the story of my star and my sister-stars,' said Kaia. 'Do you know, that among Mā-ma's people of Arru it is believed that every human soul has a star to which, if it chooses, it may go when the body is dead.'

'“If it chooses?”' he repeated.

'Yes, for they believe, too, that the soul may wait near the body in the grave, and then it can always be, if it wills, with those it loves on earth.'

'Which would you choose, Princess?'

'I should like to stay near Pà-pa, and——' She stopped, and her flush deepened. 'I don't know,' she added hastily. 'How could I tell?'

'What is the story of your star, Princess?' he asked.

'I belong to the Pleiades,' she answered. 'And the Pleiades were a flock of beautiful white birds which descended upon a plain where a great cannibal bird pursued them. The white birds were frightened and flew into the air, so high that they were caught into the sky and changed to stars. The blacks call them Miāi-miāi; and sometimes they pray to them for rain.'

'It's a pretty legend. I like to think of your star as having been a lovely white bird, and as sending down beneficent showers. I like to think, too, that our stars are near together, as one sees them in the heavens. Mine is in Orion.'

'Oh! and shall I tell you the blacks' legend about Orion?' said the girl. 'He was Berāi-berāi—a young man. And he was so splendid that the lubras pined away for love of him—those are the young girls of the camp, you know. And because of that, Baiāmé—the Great Spirit—set him in the sky where he could do no more harm, and gave him a belt and a bumerang to show that he was a *būjerē* chief.'

‘Are you sure that he didn’t do any more harm? Perhaps he made love to the Pleiades. Or did he choose one little white bird-star, and remain faithful to her for ever?’

Kaia laughed dreamily.

‘I think, Chief, that you are talking nonsense, just for the sake of humouring my foolish blacks’ superstitions.’

‘I delight in your superstitions; they chime with my own. Our stars shine together, both here and on the Pass. So you see we were bound to meet. Highness, were you glad to see me last night?’

‘Oh, so glad!’

‘I came because you had commanded me to come—because, if I am your Great One—far too grand a title for me—you are my queen.’

‘Is that really true, Great One?’ she asked seriously.

‘Certainly it is true. Have I not taken the oath?’

‘No, it is I who took the oath; you only said it after me—*Urumbūla Mahmi!*’

Again she performed the graceful act of fealty. He made no gallant protest, as an ordinary man might have done, but stood smiling down upon her, accepting her submission and glorying in it.

‘Would you do anything I, your Chief, desired of you, Princess Kaia?’

‘Yes, Great One.’

‘Then I desire that you will sing here, now, for me alone, the song which I heard you sing on that night when you first said to me “*Urumbūla Mahmi.*”’

She obeyed with no hesitation or coquetry, singing, with her eyes fixed seawards, the love-song she had sung before, as indeed he knew, to him only.

Her eyes turned to him when she had ended, and drooped before the fire of his gaze.

'Translate it to me,' he said. 'Translate it word by word, so that I may know its exact meaning.'

The red in Kaia's cheeks deepened, and now she faltered.

'Must I, Chief?'

'If it does not vex or trouble you to do so.'

'Oh no! why should it vex me? But they are silly words—blacks' words. It's a blacks' love-song, Chief. I will translate it for you if you wish.'

And she repeated phrase by phrase:

"Nuríyà! Nuríyà! - - Cease weeping;
 Nuàina warià - - - - Dearest, arise;
 Tanyàni! Tanyàni! - - Come to me, come to me;
 Nìyà ninda kà-āia - - - Thou art my love!
 Gùnyùngùn nà-ila - - - We two belong to each other;
 Nìyà ninda kà-āia - - - Thou art my love.
 Minyàgo yugila - - - Why grieveest thou?
 Gùnyùngùn nà-ila - - - We two belong to each other;
 Nìyà ninda kà-āia! - - Thou art my love—my love!"

'Kaia is your name, Princess?'

'Yes.'

'And it means—love?'

The girl was silent.

'Kaia,' he said, 'you told me that you would do anything that I should ask of you. Will you, my queen, do one other thing which I now ask of you?'

'Yes, Chief.'

'Will you give me your promise that you will never sing that song again except to me?'

'I promise, Chief.'

THE THIRD ACT
TO THE BEASTS

SCENES

IN THE WAKING LIFE

It was an afternoon in late April, and the day of Alaric Queste's Private View. The fact was proclaimed generally by a string of sandwich men in Japanese kimonos—the large-patterned blue-and-white cotton sort—who paraded Piccadilly and Regent Street. It was announced, too, by a number of supercilious footmen thronging the pavement below a certain gallery, now distinguished by a flag emblazoned in Eastern devices; also by the congestion of traffic, as smart carriages drew up and filed off, setting down beautifully-dressed ladies and distinguished-looking men, who disappeared beneath a crimson awning lettered in curious hieroglyphics, such as may be seen floating outside native shops in Malacca and Hong Kong. Alaric had realized his ambition, and had blocked Bond Street.

The show had been postponed for two reasons: Firstly, on account of the General Elections and the glorious entry into power of the Liberals, with Lord Ravage as Prime Minister; secondly, because Alaric had had a new inspiration, meaning as well, a new method, and had wished to complete three more pictures—two sea-scapes, and the allegorical portrait of Kaia Aldenning on the cliffs of Kilburra, which was to-day the centre of attraction in the exhibition.

Dorothea was helping her son to do the honours of the entertainment. She looked radiantly handsome, and seemed in excellent spirits as she stood near the entrance to the tea-room and greeted the people passing to and fro, most of whom she knew.

Over the heads of the crowd, specially illuminated, Kaia's portrait faced her at the end of the gallery. The lower part of the picture was hidden, but the upturned face and outstretched hands showed forth prominently, irradiated, as it were, by the sun's rays, which the artist had cleverly contrived should shed a soft glory over the features, etherealizing them into the semblance of something scarcely earthly. Though in the catalogue this portrait was styled merely 'The Invocation,' there could be no doubt as to its being a likeness of Kaia. The label on the frame told that it was already sold, and no secret had been made of the fact that its purchaser was Mr. Aldenning. This was natural. The dealers, however, were discussing the rumour that Mr. Aldenning had paid highly for the work.

'It's very fine—really very fine,' said the Oxford Don, Everard Cleeve, who had halted to offer his congratulations. 'I had no idea, Mrs. Queste, that your son was so great an artist.'

'But *I* had,' replied Dorothea proudly.

'They tell us that his reputation is made,' said the Professor.

'Why, of course,' put in Mr. Elwyn, the editor of the new ladies' paper, who had been lying in wait for a word. 'There aren't two opinions among the critics. Mrs. Queste, I do want you to use your influence for me—you promised, you know—in the matter of that decorative scheme in costumes we talked about.'

'Oh, Alaric will have no time now for designing costumes,' said Dorothea.

‘It needn’t be a costume—a sketch, an original study, say, of the head in “The Invocation.” Of course we all know for whom that is intended. Ah, Mrs. Queste, if I could get a study of Miss Aldenning—the merest pencil sketch—by your son, I should sell out the whole edition of my paper in a few hours.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Cleeve, ignoring the interruption, ‘I don’t presume to be a critic of modern painting, but that light on the girl’s face in “The Invocation” seems to me a wonderfully clever effect. I heard two press people just now disputing over it—a man and a woman. The woman said it was soul, the man that it was trick.’

‘They always call Alaric’s technique “trick,”’ said Dorothea.

‘It’s extremely like the fair original,’ said the editor, who would not be crushed. ‘By the way, are Mr. and Miss Aldenning here yet?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Dorothea.

‘Ah, but I think I see Lady Tregellis, and she has promised to do something for me. Mrs. Queste, I *may* count on your influence? I shall come back and talk to you about that design.’

He disappeared. Dorothea distributed smiles and how-do-you-dos. After a minute or two Everard Cleeve resumed:

‘I’m waiting to have a look at the young lady. I’ve only seen her once, and that was at a dramatic moment.’

‘Oh! I should like to know——’

‘It was on the historic occasion at Kilburra, when she faced the infuriated mob with Gavan Sarel.’

‘Ah!’

Everard Cleeve was short-sighted, and his eyeglass had fallen, but he was nevertheless aware of a sudden dimming of Dorothea’s brilliancy.

‘You read the account, of course?’ he said.

'I was in Paris at the time—a tiresome copyright business. I missed the English papers somehow, and only read a curious version of the affair in the *Figaro*. Mr. Sarel, it seems'—there was a slight hesitation—'tried to protect Miss Aldenning. Was the mob violent?'

'Well, you know what an Irish mob can be when it storms a platform. Paddy, *en masse*, was shaking the shillelagh, and Sarel's Progressivist supporters showed the white feather. I hope our friend Sebastian Blythe isn't within earshot. It seemed a case of free-fight, with Aldenning, like a lion at bay, holding the platform.'

'And Sarel?' she interrupted.

'Oh, he was looking after the young lady, trying to get her off the platform. By the way, is he a misogynist? I don't believe it. But she wouldn't go; turned round and darted to the front, eyes blazing—a vision of beauty, Artemis to the rescue. She called out something in an unknown tongue—an appeal, perhaps, to the Arruan Zeus—which was as effective, any way, as an Olympian thunderbolt. She bade them strike if they dared. Needless to say, not a shillelagh moved. I assure you it was as fine as anything I have ever seen on the stage—and I have seen Rachel—that slim girl, with all her South Sea blood aglow, pointing with a magnificent gesture to Sarel. "I am only Kaia, a stranger!" she said. "That is your Chief and mine! He loves Ireland! Hear him!"'

'Dramatic indeed!' said Dorothea. 'Oh! there are the O'Learys. Kit in the tow of a duchess! Where are our republican principles, P. O. L.? And how are you getting on? I haven't seen you since Parliament opened.'

'Bedad! and I'm still suspended between Buckingham Palace and the workhouse,' replied Pat O'Leary. 'Me evening paper isn't started yet, nor me new dress-suit ordered. The elections haven't done much for this boy. But we're splendid as far as the Cause goes, Mrs. Queste.'

And didn't we just give the Tories a licking! Though I'd rather see the Chief a free-lance than a paid servant of the Crown.'

'We were talking about the Kilburra contest,' said Cleeve. 'Were you there at the time of the row?'

'No, bad luck to it! That was when Miss Kaia made her speech. Kit and I were chaffing her about it last night.'

'Now go on with your story,' said Dorothea to the Professor. 'I'm dying to hear the end of it. Mr. Sarel ought to have felt flattered. What did he do?'

'Naturally, he made a speech, too. Now I understand the enthusiasm of that man's followers. Cold as he seems, there's a magnetism about him—he's a born leader.'

'I never knew but one man to equal him,' said O'Leary, his voice sinking in a note of genuine feeling, 'and that's the dead leader of a lost Cause—Parnell.'

'He caught the crowd by the throat,' went on Cleeve. 'In five minutes they were shouting acclamations, and showering blessings on the head of Kaia the stranger.'

'Our Princess,' said O'Leary. 'Yes, bless her!'

'Well, I don't wonder that Princess Kaia was adopted straightway by the impulsive sons of Erin,' said Cleeve.

'“Be the sons of Erin never so cold,
They are yet to be bought by women and gold,”'

said Pat. 'Sure, and it was Princess Kaia who carried Kilburra!'

'Sarel himself told me so. Now I can crow over Lady Tregellis,' added Cleeve, as the old lady's marabout plume and Miss Tolvean's daintily-flowered hat appeared behind the sloping shoulders and scarlet fez of a Turkish diplomatist, who had been haunting Mrs. Queste.

'We're blocking the gangway,' said Sir Oscar. 'What have I done that you should cut me, Mrs. Queste? It's

your portly figure, P. O. L. ! Make room. We don't want any low Irish Progressivists here. Let 'em stop at Westminster.'

'I'm off there now ; but first I must shake hands with Alaric. I say, Mrs. Queste'—in a stage whisper—'talk of low Irish Progressivists ! Did ye see Kit just now cringing to the aristocracy, and what do ye think of that for a free-born Australian ? But I'll let you into a secret. She wants to start a salon to popularize the Australian Commonwealth Declaration of Independence. Colonists even still will go anywhere to look at a live duchess.'

'My dear Thea !' cried Lady Tregellis, 'I thought I shouldn't be able to creep up to you. Heavens, the crush ! I never was at such a private view. What do the people come for ? They're actually looking at the pictures !'

'Have you seen "The Invocation," Lady Tregellis ?'

'For my sins—yes. You mean Kaia calling her spooks. I've just been telling Mr. Charafta that to get near it is as difficult as to find salvation.'

'Oh ! Is Mr. Charafta here ?'

'Yes, dear man ! He ought to be up there among the spooks. He's more mysterious than ever.'

Dorothea, caught in the swirl, was shaking hands with Kit O'Leary's duchess.

'He really mustn't, Mrs. Queste,' said the duchess, who was a woman without sentiment. 'He should consider his public, and not start off on so many new lines. After those Japanese things, everybody expects ribaldry and realism, and when your friends expect ribaldry you should be ribald.'

'Lady Tregellis,' said Everard Cleeve, 'just before you came up we were talking about Gavan Sarel. I want to tell you that I'm now independent of your faithless promises, and that I bearded the lion in his den—that is to say, in the Kilburra hotel.'

‘And how did you like your lion on closer acquaintance?’

‘I confirmed my theories in half an hour’s very agreeable talk.’

‘Oh! Do tell us your theories!’ exclaimed Miss Tol-vean.

‘The most important one is that he had a purpose to serve in playing the part of a recluse.’

‘Well, he can’t be a recluse now that he’s a Cabinet Minister,’ said Lady Tregellis. ‘We’re all fishing for him, and I’ve managed to hook him for dinner on the 2nd. Will you come? And don’t say again that I break my promises.’

Mr. Cleeve deliberately booked the invitation, while Lady Tregellis went on:

‘The Aldennings are coming. Oh, how do you do?’—to a passer-by. ‘Tea? Presently, thank you. I’ve just come from coffee and cigarettes. . . . Thea! I thought I’d lost you. Gavan Sarel and the Aldennings are dining with me on the 2nd. Winnie has written you a note.’

Dorothea answered absently that she was ‘not quite sure.’ Another swirl of the stream shuffled the straws, and these especial ones did not come together again for several moments.

‘It’s a good thing that I’ve made it Sunday,’ said Lady Tregellis, ‘or Eustace Olver might get up a critical division. I hear that he’s just mad to have his knife into Sarel.’

‘Why?’ asked Cleeve. ‘I thought that Olver was an extreme Progressivist.’

‘He’s an extreme Radical, which at this moment means something very different. My dear Everard Cleeve, you Oxford bookworms seem never to know how the Parliamentary cat is jumping. You haven’t been making use of

your opportunities. Now, here's the woman who could tell you all that's doing behind the scenes. Mrs. Queste constructs Governments, and plots the new Cabinet intrigues.'

'I!' exclaimed Dorothea. 'A harmless breadwinner, who intrigues to sell her pictures, and can construct a decent salad—that's all.'

'Ah, my dear!' cried Lady Tregellis; 'there's no use in pretending. It has transpired, as the newspapers say. What about the meeting in a certain studio of two very important personages, which happened just before the Tories went out, and resulted in the present happy amalgamation?'

'Mrs. Queste,' said an ex-Ambassador, who was also a great admirer of charming women, 'I can vouch for the construction of the salad, but as to that of Governments—I'd no idea that you plotted anything more serious than the conquest of men.'

'I assure you, Lord Challys,' exclaimed the old lady, 'that she is a mine of political information. I know only one person to equal her.'

'And that person,' said Dorothea, 'is Lady Tregellis.'

'No, indeed, my dear! It's my invaluable literary assistant, Sebastian Blythe. He tells me that there was an agreement between Sarel and Eustace Olver—that if Sarel accepted office from Ravage, it should be solely on the stipulation that Olver got place as well.'

'Oh, impossible!' put in Lady Alistair, who in the eddying of social straws had joined herself to the group. 'The Queen would have objected.'

'I thought we were a constitutional monarchy!' blandly remarked the ex-Ambassador.

'Well,' said Lady Tregellis, 'I don't know whether the sources of Sebastian Blythe's information lay anywhere near Windsor; but, at all events, Eustace Olver is out in

the cold, and I am told that he is forming a pretty big cave, and that before long there'll be a new Fourth party.'

'I hear,' said Lord Challys, 'that he has sworn, if he can't wreck the Government, to at least wreck Sarel.'

Lady Tregellis drew Dorothea a little closer into the shadow of her bonnet.

'Remember,' she said, 'I warned you against a certain Jezebel. Now I take the liberty of warning you against Jezebel's husband; he'll be wanting to put his knife into you, too. Straws show which way the tide has turned. Now just see if the *Torch* has a good word to say about Alaric's show!'

'Alaric has just now been given a commission for the portrait of Jezebel—tired head and painted face all in order,' said Dorothea.

'Never mind. I venture to prophesy that his exhibition will be slated. Not that *that* matters. I see those comforting red wafers stuck on to more than half of the pictures. If I wasn't so poor, I'd like to buy one of them; as it is, I live in hopes that I may be presented with a specimen of the unsold.'

'They are perfectly beautiful, Thea, and they are certain to be all sold. Please tell Mr. Queste that we shall count upon that invitation to dinner at the Abode,' put in Miss Tolvean, with a slight blush. 'Oh, I wish he would paint *me*!' she went on. 'Everybody is raving about that portrait of Kaia Aldenning, though it really seems,' added the young lady, with a touch of acerbity, 'that since the Drawing-room no one has talked of anyone or anything but Kaia Aldenning.'

'Oh yes,' remarked Lady Tregellis, 'if the Cabinet hadn't been formed before the Drawing-room, reporters would have left off watching Lord Ravage's house, and would have betaken themselves to Grosvenor Square to study the movements of the Arruan Princess; that's what

the society journalists call her. By the way,' she added, lowering her voice confidentially, 'the Duchess of Chaunterell is immensely anxious to know what the oyster-beds, and the submerged treasure, and the submarine cables, and all the rest, are likely to amount to in the way of *dot*. The Duke is tremendously hit. I suppose you saw that the *Torch* has already engaged them—to make things pleasantly embarrassing? But, of course, he must marry millions.'

'Mr. Aldenning seems very candid about his affairs. Why not ask him?' said Dorothea.

'Oh, pray do! You and he are great friends.'

'Not at all. I have seen very little of the Aldennings,' said Dorothea. 'My son knows them far better than I do. You see, my two tiresome expeditions to Paris happened just in the intervals of the election, when they were in London.'

'I suppose Kaia gave Mr. Queste a great many sittings?' remarked Miss Tolvean. 'Yes, I know she gave him sittings. Rosalys Thane told me she had gone with her to his studio. She took it into her head then that they were engaged. Is it true?'

Dorothea smiled and shook her head. The smile said 'Not yet,' and conveyed a probability. Miss Tolvean's suggestion was very pleasing to her; she was glad it had occurred to others. But Lady Tregellis struck in:

'Now, I'm not a match-maker, or Winnie would certainly not be in her second season, and Rosalys Thane still a widow; and you may laugh at me if you choose, but I have my reasons for offering to bet anyone who likes to take me a copy of my "*Reminiscences*" against one of Alaric's pictures that Kaia Aldenning will marry Gavan Sarel.'

'I take you, Lady Tregellis.'

It was the soft drawl of Mr. Eustace Olver that they

heard. He stood before them, smiling blandly as a sucking Mephistopheles. When he had shaken hands with Dorothea, and assured her of an almost entire unanimity among the art critics in regard to her son's work—she scented the slating prophesied by Lady Tregellis in that 'almost'—he drew a neatly-bound betting-book from his breast-pocket.

'The wager shall be duly entered,' he said; 'and then, Lady Tregellis, you must come round with me and choose an unsold picture. I shall immediately buy it on the chance that I may win the bet and keep it. All the same,' he added, 'you are still at liberty to withdraw if you please. You won't, for I am honest enough to tell you that the odds are with you. The engagement is not yet announced, but I am in a position to state that it was concluded last night on the Terrace of the House of Commons.'

'What about the *Torch* and the Duke of Chaunterell?' cried Lady Tregellis.

'Ah, even the *Torch* makes mistakes sometimes—perhaps on purpose,' replied Mr. Olver. 'Now, Lady Tregellis, are you going to withdraw?'

'Certainly not. I see that you have the generous intention of making me a present which I can't afford to give myself.'

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to lay the whole exhibition at your feet. But, notwithstanding what I've told you, I back my opinion that Miss Aldemning will not marry Gavan Sarel. What do you say, Mrs. Queste?'

Dorothea looked at him straight. There was a malicious twinkle in Mr. Olver's gray-blue eyes, but he admired her pluck.

'I think,' she said, 'that the *Torch* may be making another mistake—on purpose.'

Mr. Olver smiled sweetly.

'Orion and the paving-stones of the Terrace will bear me witness as to the proposal, and its acceptance.'

'I am neither a bird nor a miracle-monger that I should soar to the stars or make stones speak,' said Dorothea, with a laugh that trembled.

'You know the Terrace of the House of Commons very well, don't you?' said Mr. Olver, with his honeyed smile.

'I have walked, talked, and drunk tea and coffee there often enough,' she replied.

'Then you know how dark and deserted the westerly end is after dinner at the beginning of the session, when there are not so many flirtations going on. Somehow, the crowd collects mostly about the strangers' smoking-room. So you can understand how clearly sound travels, and how, with the most strictly honourable intentions, one might for a few moments become an inadvertent eaves-dropper?'

Dorothea had herself in grip. Her own voice sounded in her ears like that of a ghost, it was so strangely far away.

'It seems to me,' she said, 'that in common justice you ought to have told Lady Tregellis that you were betting on a certainty.'

Olver glanced at the old lady, who had intercepted Augustus Charafta, and was asking him to dine with her on the 2nd.

'Lady Tregellis will have a good many copies of her "Reminiscences" on hand,' he said. 'And didn't I warn her? Besides, as to the certainty. Not at all! To be engaged and to be married are two very different things. In this case, I fully recognise the existence of "just impediment."' With a slight bow which pointed the remark Mr. Olver turned away. 'My dear Lady Tregellis,

political and editorial duties can't be postponed. Suppose we take our little walk now, and look at "Morning over Kilburra"? It would be appropriate, don't you think, to the subject of the bet?

* * * * *

Now, for a space indefinite, the universe was to Dorothea but one immeasurable agony. She seemed a lost soul floating in mists of pain.

'Let me pilot you into a quieter corner,' said the voice of Charafta.

She turned to him wildly, and involuntarily put out her hand. He took it within his own, holding it as he steered her towards a recess in the gallery, beyond which was a room devoted to one picture—a sacred subject by a French painter—which to-day had few visitors. These visitors were prevented from assisting at Alaric's private view by a heavy curtain and barrier-rope drawn across the opening.

It seemed to Dorothea that the crowd melted before Charafta, or that he somehow interposed himself between her and it, for no one spoke to her, or took any notice, while, leading her like a child by the hand, he passed through the pressing mass. Certainly, there was some stimulating magnetism in his clasp, for her spirit revived; earth became solid once more, and the mists dissolved. Through the blur she perceived the sympathetic faces of Lady Rosalys Thane and of that straying angel, Mrs. Winterbourne. They had seen her, and were making for the recess.

'Oh, keep them away!' said Dorothea, looking imploringly at Charafta, whose eyes were bent on her, and were full of tender pity—she thought, also, of comprehension.

He placed himself right in front of her.

'I am not very big,' he said, 'but I will do my best to hide you.'

He looked more wizened and shrunk than ever, and, as Lady Tregellis had said, more mysterious, perhaps in contrast with the frivolous, well-dressed, and wholly mundane assemblage. Yet never had Dorothea been more impressed by the grandeur of his prophet's head, and by the extraordinary majesty of his brow and of his deep-set eyes. If only she might continue to hold his hand, she fancied the devils besetting her would be kept at bay. She had the awful feeling of one unduly sensitive to supernatural influences who awakes in the dark and becomes aware of the presence of powers of evil.

'Oh, don't leave me! When you stand there—between me and the world—I don't feel so lost—so helpless.' She spoke in a broken, wandering way. 'You could help me—I know you could help me—if you would.'

'I would, indeed I would, if I might. But there are burdens which no man may bear for his brother,' said Charafta. 'The Greater Law decreed them, and only through the Law of Sacrifice can they be lifted.'

'The Law of Sacrifice!' she repeated. 'What sacrifice?'

'The sacrifice of the body to the soul,' he answered, his deep voice vibrating with a wondrous compassion. 'My friend, it is little I can do to help you, and that little may not be spoken of here. But we shall meet to-night.'

'To-night! But how? Oh, I have longed to ask you. I dreamed an extraordinary dream—after you had left me, in which you said strange things. I cannot remember them now. It has all gone from me. My mind is confused; I cannot think. I am in trouble, I am in pain. I *dare* not think. I dare not ask myself if this terrible

thing is real, if it be true that my delight is taken from me, and that I am desolate and betrayed.'

The last words were a scarcely-audible wail. She spoke in a passionate whisper, which nevertheless reached him clearly, above the tumult of talk and laughter echoing down the gallery. Now Lady Rosalys' nearer tones rose silvery and colourless, and made Dorothea shrink in nervous terror.

'I *did* see her,' said Lady Rosalys. 'Perhaps she is in the tea-room.'

'We shall meet to-night,' Charafta said again. 'Then all that I can do for your comfort and counsel shall be done. And now be brave. Do you not remember that when last we talked I warned you of an ordeal through which you must pass, before the door of the Temple could be opened to you? Think of the anguish you are about to undergo as an expiation. Think of it as the death-wrench by which your immortal self is freed from the fetters of a sinful past. And know that, though the world become darkness, and though all you love forsake you, there is One whose love is infinite, by Whom you can never be forsaken. Know that nearer to you than lover, husband, father, son, stands Asphalion.'

He uttered that sacred name, not, it seemed to Dorothea's dazed sense, with his lips, but in some inward manner, so that it fell not upon her bodily ear, but was spoken in her heart. And almost before she could realize that he had left her, Charafta was gone, and had become lost in the moving throng.

Again everything seemed to sway, and grow indistinct, and she caught at the curtain for support. . . .

'Oh, my dear Thea!' Lady Rosalys was holding a scent-bottle to her nostrils. 'There, that's all right! I'm

sure this crush and the stuffiness of the place are enough to make an elephant feel faint. And you've been in it all day. Mr. Blythe, can't you draw back those curtains and get a chair? Oh, cut the rope! What *does* it matter?'

Sebastian solved the question by leaping the barrier.

'It isn't rope, Lady Rosalys; it's iron covered with velvet. There aren't any chairs, but I think this will do.'

He snatched the cushion from a settee fixed in front of the sacred picture, disturbing a devotional old lady, who looked back in anger at the chattering brilliant throng seen through the rift in the curtains, and hastily departed. Sebastian laid the cushion along the barrier, and against a projecting pillar, thus improvising a support for Dorothea, who leaned against it gratefully.

'Now go and get champagne-cup, or something reviving. I saw a jug which looked alcoholic in the tea-room. No, brandy would be much better. There's always brandy where there are men. At once—go!'

Sebastian hardly needed Lady Rosalys' imperious command. In little more than a minute he was offering iced cup that he had seized from the hands of the Turk, who respected not his Koran, into which he had poured a stiff dram of brandy procured from some private receptacle. Dorothea swallowed a draught, pulled her faculties together, stared, and laughed at Lady Rosalys' concern.

'Thank you, Alys. I'm all right now. This is the time of year that makes one feel a worm. It's a used-up sensation peculiar to the spring. Perhaps if I could bud I should be more in accord with the season. The warmer the day, the more of a worm I feel.'

'You didn't look a worm,' said Lady Rosalys. 'We were watching you across the gallery, and I was saying to Angela that your son's success or your Paris trip had put you back ten years—or perhaps it was the frock.'

Dorothea threw back the concoction of fur and lace, and laughed again.

‘I am stifled. I had east winds in my mind when I chose this. It’s impossible to dress up to a changeable spring.’

‘But there’s an east wind to-day,’ said Sebastian. ‘I am shivering.’

‘You are always shivering,’ said Lady Rosalys. ‘Go and drink some hot coffee.’

‘It isn’t hot,’ replied Sebastian. ‘It’s never hot in these places.’

Angela Winterbourne had said nothing, but her beautiful blue eyes had beamed heavenly sympathy as she softly ministered to Dorothea. She again tendered the tumbler of iced drink.

‘Do finish it.’

‘You are not a Server,’ said Lady Rosalys. ‘Angela would sooner die herself than drink that.’

Dorothea drank it all. The spirit coursed through her veins and gave her greater courage.

‘Now you’re young and beautiful again,’ said Lady Rosalys, her crisp, high-bred tones mellowing with the note of affection. ‘You look as you looked a quarter of an hour ago. I was watching you. Then all in a moment your nerves seemed to give way, and you just—went.’

‘I just—went,’ Dorothea repeated vaguely, ‘all in a moment—the heat—the crowd. Nerves gave way; it’s a trick of mine. But I rebound.’

‘The trick of all finely-strung nervous systems,’ put in Sebastian Blythe. ‘They’re flexible steel. They give way; they rebound.’

‘But never break.’

Dorothea looked at him as straightly as she had looked at Eustace Olver.

'Till breaking-point comes,' he answered.

Sebastian Blythe, who was a bit of a coward, could nevertheless admire bravery, and, like Eustace Olver, he mentally commended Dorothea's pluck. He, too, had had speech with Olver, and at first sight of Dorothea he had said to himself, 'She has heard the news.' Then with sly divination he had added, 'She is to be won.'

'You should have been in Paris with me.' Dorothea addressed Lady Rosalys. 'You love clothes.'

'Oh, I do,' she replied; 'almost as much as I detest men.'

'We are agreed. I am too old for lightly turning to thoughts of love, so there's nothing left but, like Tennyson's lapwing, to get one's self another crest. In the intervals of business I discoursed with man-milliners. In the evenings I studied gowns at the theatres.'

'Delightful!' said Lady Rosalys. 'But I'm staying with Angela while my drains are being set in order. We talk mystic philosophy instead of frocks. Yes, I see our sleeves are all wrong.' She lightly touched Dorothea's arm with her delicate gray finger-tips. 'Is that a man-milliner, or a private inspiration?'

Dorothea muttered a magic name.

'Oh, I'll write at once. So many thanks! I do appreciate a woman who has a great soul and yet grovels among gowns. Do you hear, Angela?'

Mrs. Winterbourne gave her remote and celestial smile.

'I don't envy you your great mind or your grovelling soul, whichever Rosalys likes to call it,' she said, 'or your beautiful gowns, either. But I do envy you your son. It must be so satisfying to be proud of one's son.'

'We've been congratulating him,' said Lady Rosalys. 'Everybody says he is going to be the portrait-painter of the future. I've given him a commission.'

‘That was very nice of you, Alys.’

‘Not at all. And it isn’t myself that I’ve commissioned him to paint, but Mr. Charafta. I’m going to give the portrait to Angela Winterbourne, and she can present it to the inner lodge of the Servers, or keep it herself to say her prayers to.’

‘Rosalys!’

‘We’ll say our prayers to it together, Angela. Almost thou persuadest me to be a Server. Do you know that yesterday we were at a sort of lecture at Mr. Charafta’s rooms? It was a reading from—what was it, Angela?’

‘Ovid’s “Metamorphoses.”’

‘I thought it was Pythagoras. Did you know that the Servers are Pythagoreans? I must tell Mr. Cleeve. It was a shock of relief to find that Angela’s cat isn’t a witch. I had two shocks, for I always thought that Ovid was dreadfully improper, and this was a sermon by Pythagoras about eating vegetables, and living over again in new bodies. How nice that would be! Only, Angela, I do hope that I shall be a man next time, so that I can’t be worried by people trying to marry me. Don’t you think that you and the ghosts of Ovid and Pythagoras, and Mr. Charafta, might manage it among you?’

‘Can you tell me where Mr. Charafta has been?’ asked Dorothea, turning to Mrs. Winterbourne. ‘Till just now I had not seen him for months.’

‘I believe that he has been in Cyprus,’ replied Mrs. Winterbourne.

‘Nobody ever knows where Mr. Charafta has been,’ said Sebastian Blythe. ‘I have heard it hinted that he locks up his body comfortably in a secret chamber in the Albany, while his soul makes visitations to other spheres.’

Mrs. Winterbourne’s delicate cheek flushed slightly.

She did not care for Sebastian Blythe, whom she had never invited into her house, and she revered Mr. Charafta. Lady Rosalys, who saw that she was annoyed, broke in :

‘What a brilliant success it is ! People as well as pictures. There’s a crowd outside that’s reducing the police to despair,’ she went on. ‘“I ain’t a-goin’ to be shoved on till I’ve seen that ’ere savage Princess as won the election !” one nice beery person said. And somebody else called out : “Who’s this ’ere Alaric Queste ? I ’old on to Gavan Sarel !” And somebody else shouted . “’Ere’s the Prime Minister !” Well, Mr. Queste ought to be satisfied with the sensation he is making.’

The chatter went on. To Dorothea it sounded as the crackling of thorns beneath a pot.

There came a faint echo of cheering which pierced the buzz of talk. It seemed rather more fervid than the ordinary acclaiming of a popular Minister. In a few minutes the fervour was explained. Lord Ravage entered, his spare form, bent slightly with the student’s stoop, and his refined Velasquez face, attracting much attention as he walked into the gallery. But more noticeable still was the other towering form that followed him, with its broad, square shoulders, its sinewy throat, and fine mask of a face, out of which the impenetrable gray eyes surveyed the scene as through thick glass. This was almost the first appearance Sarel had made at any social gathering. A hush went round the assembly, and many a pince-nez was adjusted. On the face of things, his appearance was easily explained. He had been lunching with his chief and Mrs. de Burgh, and the two Ministers were on their way together to the House of Commons.

But to Dorothea this unexpected sight of him was as the confirmation of Eustace Olver’s announcement, which, after the first blow, she had steadily determined within

herself to disbelieve. In her fancy it portended a new departure, an embracing of the conventions—too possibly of the matrimonial conventions. He was poor, his star beckoned him, he was on his way to becoming the political ruler of England. Kaia Aldenning was rich. Again earth reeled. She was conscious that Sebastian Blythe's gaze was upon her. All other eyes were diverted to those two figures, now quietly making their way round the gallery.

Alaric had at once perceived and gone forward to meet them. Dorothea saw that Alaric was shaking hands with Sarel. For the moment she forgot that they had made acquaintance at Kilburra, and fancied that Lord Ravage had introduced the two men. Ravage introducing *her* son to Gavan Sarel! There seemed to her something so grimly humorous in the situation that she laughed outright.

Then she became aware of how she had laughed, and thought she must be going mad.

Sebastian came nearer.

‘You *are* overstrained. Those flexible steel nerves of yours are stretched to their utmost. I am not surprised. You got my letter this morning?’

‘Thank you. Its contents have been confirmed by a telegram. But I am quite unable to imagine how you heard the news.’

‘In the simplest way possible. It was telegraphed from Baziria to the *Hemisphere*.’

‘Oh!’ She leaned towards him, her brow ruffled. ‘If my husband's death has already got into the papers, people must be wondering and saying disagreeable things. I ought to have guarded against that possibility.’

‘And have missed the sight of Ral's splendid success! But be at ease, dear lady. I happened by good luck to be at the office of the *Hemisphere* when the telegram came in,

and got it suppressed. It won't appear until you wish for a public announcement.'

'Thank you. That was thoughtful. Of course,' she added, 'since you know the circumstances, you must know, too, that I cannot pretend to feel any deep grief. I did not want to cast a shadow upon this day, so important in Ral's career, by reviving painful associations, and making explanations which till now have hardly seemed necessary. A few hours one way or the other couldn't matter. You would understand my motive?'

'Perfectly. In this, as in all else, you have my deepest sympathy and admiration—if you do not despise such an offering from me.'

There was the note of genuine emotion in his voice which fell gratefully upon her tortured heart.

'Sebastian,' she said, with an air of frank comradeship which set the man's hopes once more dangerously alight, 'we were good friends once, and I know that you've worked your hardest to make Ral's show a success for my sake and for his. I'm really grateful to you. Let us be good friends again, and come and see me after working hours as you used.'

'I ask nothing better,' he exclaimed. 'It's joy inexpressible to me to be admitted once more on the old terms to your house. May I call to-morrow?'

She hesitated, but answered:

'Yes. I have a sitter at twelve. Come any time before that or after.'

He withdrew, bowing deferentially to Lord Ravage, who approached her. Alaric was with him. The young man looked anxious and excited. He did not wait for Lord Ravage to address his mother, but plunged at once into the subject on his mind.

'Doda, do you know—have you seen the Aldennings here yet?'

‘No, I have not seen them.’

‘Do you know,’ he began again, ‘the report that Eustace Olver is circulating through London?’

‘No.’ Dorothea had paled. By an effort she kept grasp upon herself, but she could not utter the words. ‘No,’ she repeated.

‘That Kaia Aldenning is engaged to Gavan Sarel. I won’t believe it. It is absurd—impossible! But Eustace Olver ought to be flogged for making so free with a young lady’s name.’

‘You and Mr. Sarel are colleagues.’ Dorothea turned steadily to Ravage. ‘He came here with you. Do you know if Mr. Olver has any real grounds for making such a statement?’

‘I know of nothing to confirm it,’ he replied. ‘It appears to me a breach of good taste, as Alaric says, and certainly unwarrantable on Olver’s part. No, I can’t say if there’s any truth in the report of the engagement. Sarel has not taken me into his confidence. It would not be likely that he should.’

‘She is here!’ cried Alaric.

The Aldennings were entering the gallery.

Alaric had been gazing towards the door, and now his face changed. A look of happiness illuminated it, and he stepped forward with the air of a young conqueror to greet the lady of his love; for Kaia’s beautiful eyes had sought him immediately upon her entrance, and she had smiled upon him a most sweet smile of welcome—a smile in which there was something confidential and appealing, as though in him and in him alone could she be certain of finding true comprehension and sympathy. At once the pangs he had been enduring were assuaged, and his self-confidence returned. It seemed to him that he knew why she had turned to him, why her face wore that tremulous, pathetic look. She was beginning at last

to realize life and love. The rose-petals were unfolding. How wise he had been not to force them prematurely open !

Oh yes, he had been very patient. Two days before, as he had sat with her in one of the inner drawing-rooms of her father's house—that big new house which he had been commissioned to adapt and decorate, thus securing to himself priceless opportunities for sight and speech of Kaia—she had talked to him of the strange experiences now befalling her; of the curious sensation of finding herself suddenly an object of supreme attention wherever she went, so that people thronged the Row when she drove or rode, and craned their heads at the opera for a sight of her, and waited at the foot of the staircase to see her pass down from her opera-box, while her little blacks' Ugals made such an enthusiasm in fashionable assemblies that very great persons indeed especially desired to hear them, and begged for her queer aboriginal phrases as though they had been inspired utterances. She had told Alaric artlessly how nervous she felt at having all eyes turned upon her, and a way cleared when she went to crowded gatherings, just, she said, as though she were some royal lady, instead of being merely Kaia from the Pass, a stranger.

And did she not possess the royal prerogative of beauty? Alaric had stoutly protested. And was it surprising that the world should acknowledge her sway? And was she not in truth a Princess in her mother's right, he declared—the Princess of Arru, as the paragraphists delighted to style her, seizing upon the mock title for its picturesqueness, though it is probable that scarcely one knew the exact position of the island of Arru on the map.

And they had laughed together, he and she, over

the cutting from the *Torch* which had announced her conquest of the Duke of Chaunterell; and she had made merry with him over certain other admirers—there were many of these—whom her beauty and reputation of wealth had brought swarming like moths round a candle. And though she had freely given him to understand that he ranked immeasurably above such suitors in her estimation, standing upon quite a different level, and though his heart had thrilled in gladness when she had assured him that she cared nothing for the great persons and the aristocratic parties, and that far dearer to her were the roamings with him along the sands of Kilburra and the quiet talks they had once or twice had in the studio when her father had found business elsewhere, and had left them alone together, he had, nevertheless, restrained himself from any definite avowal, resolved to wait until his private view was over—till the critics and the public had settled what place he was to take among the artists of the day.

Thinking back upon those intimate times, he remembered that she had said nothing in particular about Sarel; and, indeed, it had sometimes seemed to him strange, considering her deep interest in the battle and the party, that she should hardly ever mention the Chief, except in the most casual fashion. He had attributed her reticence, however, to natural awe of the leader, and to the great difference in age between them. Certainly Sarel, with his forty odd years and the gray flecks upon his dark hair, might well have presented himself to Kaia rather in the light of a father than a lover.

How sweet Alaric had felt it to be the recipient of her maiden confidences, her innocent trepidations and audacities. On that afternoon he had gone home in

a sort of tender delirium, scarcely treading earth it seemed, as he had turned off and wandered among the budding trees of the Park. He could well afford to wait forty-eight hours longer, he told himself. It looked so near, so certain—the triumph which indeed had come to him to-day. He had known that he was going to succeed. Kaia had given him his soul. Would she crown the gift with that of her heart also?

So sure had he felt of her, that he had opened his own heart to his mother the next evening, when they sat alone together in the studio. This was the night of Dorothea's return from Paris, where she had been detained by some legal business relating to an infringement of the copyright of one of her pictures. He had then been struck by a certain change in her. She had seemed worn, wearied, and disillusioned. For the first time he had realized that she belonged to an elder generation than himself. She had spoken of herself as out in the cold, passed by, and forgotten in the eager rush of her friends for place and power. He wondered at the moment whether Lord Ravage had disappointed her; whether she foresaw that the busy Prime Minister would be a less devoted friend than the poet at leisure. But beneath the spell of his ardent confidences the bitterness of her mood passed, and her buoyancy of temperament showed itself. Her sympathies expanded like the petals of a drooping flower under refreshing rain. Once more she was the Doda of his happiest recollections, youthful, great-hearted, encouraging, with many quaint humours, and a certain pungent worldliness, but, where he was concerned, full of loving enthusiasm and belief in his power to will and to accomplish. How little had Alaric guessed that his own passionate certainty of winning Kaia, which every hopeful word of hers strengthened, was to Dorothea a

magician's exorcism, driving back the dread spectre which of late, waking or sleeping, had haunted her existence. The shadow of it was upon her now, though her gloomy fear had lightened a little at sight of Kaia's smile and evident pleasure in Alaric's greeting.

She watched the two young people as they moved up the gallery, and Lord Ravage, following her eyes, smiled his gentle smile, remarking :

‘Well, well, as the old proverb says, “Wilful will to’t.”’

‘You think he is going to be disappointed?’ she asked.

‘No, no! How can I say? A girl's heart is a strange and incalculable thing; but there's every reason why she should love him—he is so handsome, so talented, and so unconsciously dominant. My doubt lies in the fact that she shows her preference so frankly.’

‘You forget that she is half a barbarian, and does not understand the conventional reticences.’

‘That is true. Yet I fancy that there are certain reticences common alike to savage and sophisticated womanhood; but don't let us talk of Alaric just now. I am distressed about you, my friend—distressed, too, that I could not go and welcome you last evening. We had incessant divisions, committees, and consultations, and the hours wore on, a blank to me for want of the sight of you.’

He noticed that her eyes were filled with tears, and said in a low voice :

‘Dorothea, what is it?’

‘Nothing; yes, a great deal. How can I ever repay you, Ravage, for your patient affection?’

‘You will repay me some day. Truly, you have repaid me already. There can be no debtor and creditor account in the matter of affection.’

Some impulse made her say what she had intended to keep back till they were alone.

'My husband is dead. I had a telegram this morning from Baziria.'

A light—involuntary and resolutely quenched—came into his face.

'Then I understand your mood, and, indeed, I can share the conflict of feeling you must be going through. Dear friend, the tension has been too great. I knew there was something very wrong when I first caught sight of you, though someone was remarking upon your wonderful flow of spirits.'

'Oh, a wonderful flow of spirits!' she exclaimed hysterically. 'The tide has ebbed now. Yes, I talked, and I laughed, and I made merry. Oh, God! your only jig-maker! I have been the jig-maker to-day.'

'Dorothea, you are quite unstrung. Come home. Let me speak to Mary, and then put you into my brougham.'

'No, no! I'll play out the act for Alaric's sake. But, yes, go and speak to Mary, and come back; I want to say something to Mr Sarel.'

Ravage made way for his colleague. Sarel was approaching. It seemed as though he had purposely avoided Kaia and Alaric, whom he must have seen on his passage down the gallery. Dorothea advanced deliberately to meet him, and held out her hand.

Friendly commonplaces passed. She had heard and uttered them a hundred times that afternoon—congratulations, appreciations; now, on his part, admiring criticism of Alaric's pictures, with, she thought, a pointed ignoring of that one which had, more or less, made the success of the exhibition. She had a mind to ask him if he considered it a good portrait of Kaia, but kept back that woman's barb. She, on her side, returned a smiling acknowledgment of the compliment his presence, so

unwonted in such places, conferred upon her son and herself.

The crowd was straining to catch every word the great man spoke; agape at the signs of a long-standing intimacy between Dorothea Queste and the new Minister of State, who was supposed to have had no acquaintance with women of society. Dorothea was aware of the interest they excited, and seemed desirous of emphasizing the fact of her friendship with Sarel.

‘I was so sorry not to see you before I left for Paris. You would understand that I had been detained. . . . A most tiresome time. . . . You will have some tea?’

She pointed to the side-room, where Matsu, Alaric’s Japanese servant, dressed in a kimono, acted as a sort of major-domo, and ushered in the guests with elaborate Eastern ceremony.

‘Thanks, no. I must get down to the House. Herbril and a deputation are waiting for me.’

‘Then,’ she said pointedly, ‘it will not trouble you much, perhaps, as you go out, to take me down and put me into a cab. I don’t think I can quite pilot myself through the crowd at the doorway.’

‘Certainly,’ he answered. ‘You must be tired. I believe that you have done your duty nobly.’

‘I am tired,’ Dorothea repeated, ‘and I believe, too, that I have done my duty; I am not sure that I have done it nobly.’

At that moment Mr. Aldenning’s voice interposed, and the Australian giant obscured a flashing glimpse she had of Kaia, the focussing-point of many eyeglasses.

‘I was disappointed, Mrs. Queste, not to see you when Kaia and I called the other day. I wanted to talk to you about your son.’

‘You have been very good to my son,’ replied Dorothea. ‘We are more than grateful.’

'The favour, ma'am, is on his side. Yes, your son's all right. He interested Jessup of Shanghai, and I have never known Jessup wrong in his estimate of character. And to-day he proves himself. He proves his ability as an artist, the strength of his will as a man. . . . I believe in will-power.'

Dorothea's eyes were roving. Again she saw Kaia. The extraordinary beauty of the girl struck her with a new force. No wonder everybody looked at Kaia! She was so straight, so slender, yet with all the curves of her form melting into one another, giving a peculiar effect of Asiatic grace. Her cheeks had the bloom of one of her own tropical flowers or of a sun-warmed apricot; her lips were as the pomegranates in the Song of Solomon; her hair, too, had enmeshed the sun in its darkness; and her eyes—they in themselves were little suns. Dorothea was quoting to herself Alaric's Eastern metaphors; he had poured them out to her on the night of his confidences. What a splendid pair they made, these two! both in the full glory of youth, beauty, and love. For that was the meaning of Kaia's dreamy exultation. The ripe sweetness of her lips betrayed her. Had Sarel kissed them?

The thought was a sword piercing Dorothea's bosom. Her torture seemed unbearable. She could not grasp the sense of what Mr. Aldenning was saying—caught only the words, 'Jessup of Shanghai—Alaric—New Guinea Concession—a magnificent field for an artist—should be made worth while'—a detached jumble.

She had perceived that Sarel and Kaia interchanged glances; nay, it was the leap and blend of two soft flames. There was something significant in the lack of conventional greetings; they must have met before that day. But more fatally suggestive were Kaia's vivid blush and indescribably conscious smile. She spoke to Sarel in a low tone, and the mask of his face melted as he, too,

smiled, and answered her, not so low but that Dorothea's sensitive ear heard, though it did not literally understand the phrase :

‘*Urumbūla Mahmi !*’

The girl laughed. She looked as she had looked while singing ‘*N̄iyà ninda kà-āia.*’ Evidently, Dorothea thought, the words had some romantic personal association. Had Alaric heard them? Had he noticed that tender glance? Was he so blinded by self-confidence that he could not see these two were lovers?

He was pressing forward.

‘Oh, Doda, Miss Aldenning says she could come to-morrow. Couldn’t you arrange for luncheon?’

‘Girlie, remember that, if you want a front place in the Ladies’ Gallery, you’ll have to be at the House in good time,’ put in Mr. Aldenning.

‘He is going to speak.’

Kaia’s shy explanatory gesture might have indicated either of the two legislators.

‘Your father?’ said Dorothea.

‘No, the Chief’—still shyly. ‘Couldn’t—wouldn’t you like to hear the Chief speak? I have two places. I was going to ask Kit O’Leary, but if you would——’

‘Mrs. Queste, you asked me to put you into a cab.’

Sarel cut short the half-delivered invitation.

‘But to-morrow?’ exclaimed Alaric.

‘I am afraid to-morrow is impossible.’ Dorothea put her hand on Sarel’s proffered arm. ‘I will write.’

He hurried her through the crowd. She scarcely made her good-byes.

Kaia gazed after them with wistful eyes.

‘Your mother doesn’t care for me,’ she said. ‘I feel it here.’ She touched her breast.

‘Oh, no, no! I assure you that you are mistaken!’

Alaric cried, deeply hurt at his mother's brusque departure. 'You would not say that, if you could hear her speak of you. She cannot be well; it isn't like Doda.'

'If your mother is ill,' said Kaia, 'you ought to go with her and look after her. You should not leave her to the care of Mr. Sarel, who must be almost a stranger.'

'Oh, I don't suppose he is a stranger,' said Alaric. 'My mother seems to know most people pretty well. And Doda is never ill,' he added contradictorily. 'Kaia,' he went on in a different tone, 'I want you to love my mother.'

'I do love her. Do you know that she has for me quite an extraordinary fascination? I longed just now to take her hands in mine, and to look into her eyes, and charm away her sickness, as my M^a-ma used to do. But I should never dare. Something seems to go out from her and hold me at a distance. And I long so to have her sympathy. I long to say to her——'

Kaia hesitated, and looked down.

'What is it, Kaia? Oh, do tell me what it is that you'd like to say to my mother!'

'All that is in my heart. It's so full; it makes me want M^a-ma. To-day is a wonderful day for me, Alaric. And though your mother isn't a bit like M^a-ma—not a bit, in most ways—yet somehow she seems to me to have the Eyes that see, and I am sure she would understand. Oh, my heart is full of wonder and happiness! . . . Do you remember something you said to me one evening as we were sitting over the fire at Kilburra?'

'Yes, yes!' he cried eagerly. 'I told you that the time would come when the heart of the rose would unfold of itself, and when the wind might tell its story, and know that it would be heard and understood. Yes, Kaia, I was right to wait, because what I said has proved itself true.'

‘Right to wait!’ A shade of uneasiness crossed the girl’s face. ‘But we settled all that, Alaric, and I felt so grateful to you for understanding. Of course, you must have guessed, and that’s why you have been so good and sympathetic and brotherly. I loved you for it, Alaric. And your art has been everything to you. I have seen that it is your soul. To-day proves it.’

‘You have given me my soul, Kaia. Yes, to-day proves it. And my heart, too, is full of wonder and happiness. I want to fall on my knees and thank you and worship you. Can I come this evening?’

Kaia laughed.

‘No, Ral. My happy day, this very happiest day in all my whole life, is occupied every minute. Presently we go to the House of Commons, and we are to dine there with—the O’Learys and one or two others. And after that I rush home to dress for a concert first, and then there’s the ball at Chaunterell House.’

‘And I shall not be at any of the places where you are going,’ he said regretfully.

‘That is your own fault. If you had done what Lady Tregellis told you, and had left cards at people’s houses, and had shown yourself about, you would have been at all of them.’

‘I will leave cards everywhere immediately. I will hunt up a sponsor for the next levee. I will ask Lady Tregellis to present me to the Duchess if she is in the gallery. Perhaps, after all, I shall meet you to-night. Then, may I call upon you, Kaia, to-morrow?’

‘To-morrow? You shall lunch with us, since your mother will not have me. You may come an hour or two beforehand if you like, and you shall tell me all you feel, and I will tell you about my happiness.’

Some great lady, who wanted to secure the Australian beauty as an assistant at a forthcoming bazaar, came up

just then and caught Kaia as her father also approached to take her off to the House of Commons. While Aldenning waited, he spoke to Alaric.

'Look here,' he began, 'I've a word to say to you. I hear Eustace Olver has given you a commission to paint his wife, and that they want to turn you into the fashionable portrait-painter of the season. Now, don't you go making yourself cheap.'

'There's not much fear of that,' answered Alaric with easy assurance. 'You needn't be at all afraid, sir. It isn't my way to cheapen myself.'

'No, I don't think it is,' assented Mr. Aldenning, 'and that's the reason why you've got on in the world. If you want to be talked about, do work for nothing, or else ask an extravagant price for it. Only mind, when you don't work for bank-notes, make sure that you are paid in another sort of coin.'

'And what's that, sir?' asked Alaric. 'Love?'

'No,' replied Mr. Aldenning, frowning. 'Love isn't a thing to be mentioned in this connection.'

'I agree with you, and I beg your pardon,' said Alaric fervently, reddening under the rebuke.

'The coin I meant,' said Mr. Aldenning, 'is advertisement.'

'Oh, I'm with you there, too, entirely,' replied Alaric, recovering himself. 'Jessup of Shanghai taught me the value of advertisement.'

'That brings me to what I wanted to ask you,' said Aldenning. 'What do you think of meeting Jessup at Buitenzorg—say in August?'

'Buitenzorg—Java! Why, that I'd like it enormously. But I don't know exactly how it's to be managed. You see, I'm settling down. I've bought the Abode, and I want to decorate and furnish it so that it shall be as good an advertisement as my name on a red hoarding in Picca-

dilly. That's what this Show is for—that—and other things.'

'What other things?'

'It doesn't strike you'—Alaric gave a questioning glance into the elder man's face—'it hasn't struck you, sir, that I might be thinking of making the Abode a desirable residence for a lady?'

'You mean that you are in love?'

A shade came over Aldenning's brow, and he frowned again. He bent his great form forward, and his bristling red-gray eyebrows almost met as he peered intently from beneath them into Alaric's eyes.

The young man did not return the gaze. He wanted Kaia's father to suspect his secret, but he was not yet prepared to avow it. When Mr. Aldenning said, with a certain gruff anxiety in his tone: 'I suppose that I mustn't ask the name of the lady?' Alaric turned off the question with an embarrassed laugh.

'Perhaps not this very moment, sir. But you'll find that I haven't cheapened myself by my choice. I've dared to look high.'

Aldenning laid a heavy but kindly hand on Alaric's shoulder, and replied in an impetuous manner not usual with him:

'Be prepared then, boy, for disappointment. We can't always pull down the stars, though some of us may succeed in doing so. It takes a long arm and a strong arm for that.'

Alaric slightly extended his, casting a triumphant glance towards his big picture.

'The arm is lengthening and strengthening, sir; at least, the critics are saying so to-day.'

'Yes, yes; I congratulate you. And I'm proud to have had a hand, too, in fixing its market value. It's my business, Ral, to let the dealers know what I intend to

pay for "The Invocation." Stick to work, boy,' he went on benevolently, 'and don't miss a chance of making money. You'll find both things more satisfying, in a general way, than love. And here's your chance now to start a pile—outside art.'

'Outside art?' repeated Alaric.

'Just so. You'll be a fool if you don't take it. The curse of painters is that they've got to paint for money. You'll do your work better, and get bigger prices for what you do, when you are independent of critics and commissions.'

'I believe that, so far, I haven't lost many chances of improving my fortune,' said Alaric modestly. 'I am all attention now.'

Mr. Aldenning resumed his dry manner.

'As soon as the House is up—perhaps before, if nothing big is coming on—I shall start in my steam-yacht on a trip to New Guinea, picking up Jessup at Batavia. Let me advise you not to undertake any commissions that will carry you beyond the second week in July. We'll make it worth your while—Jessup and I—to chuck commissions for the present.'

'You are suggesting a New Guinea show for the autumn,' said Alaric, purposely obtuse. 'I had thought of that.'

'Oh, if you like I'll give you an order at once to decorate my new ballroom wing with South Sea Island paintings. That's not what I meant, however.' He drew Alaric a little out of the crush, and his voice lowered. 'It's about my Concession pie. There'll be some plums in it. I always wanted you and your mother to have a tit-bit.'

'I am sure, sir, that we are both infinitely obliged to you.'

'I didn't want to speak till things were more settled,

but I think I may say, as far as the Governments here and at the Hague are concerned, that the New Guinea Concession is an accomplished fact. We may consider that the Charter is virtually in our hands.'

'Let me offer you my humble congratulations. But, of course, it was to be expected. You and Mr. Jessup have mixed and baked a good many pies, haven't you?'

'Yes, we have. But none quite so big as this one. There are the pearl-fisheries, you see, as well. And you understand what I meant by starting your pile, and also the advantage of being one of the first on the field. There'll be a swarm of capitalists out there shortly.'

'I suppose so. But may I point out that we—my mother and I—are not capitalists, much as we should enjoy a bit of the pie?'

'That's no matter. Out in Australia, pioneers taking up runs have a right of selection called the pre-emptive right. I mean something of that sort. Just leave yourself in Jessup's hands—and mine.' Again Mr. Aldenning laid his rough palm on Alaric's shoulder. 'You'll be all right. . . . There, I see Kaia is out of the Duchess's claws at last, and we must be getting along. I'll put you on to the lay of the country another time.'

'Till to-morrow,' said Kaia, as they parted. 'You will come in the morning . . . because I . . . I have an engagement at three.'

Alaric noticed the slight hesitation, also that she blushed. Why should she blush? and what was the engagement? Then he remembered what she had said about hearing the Chief speak on the morrow. Of course it was quite natural that she should look forward to that, especially after her part in the Kilburra election. It was quite to be expected that she should have all the enthusiasm of a girl-worshipper towards her political hero. Alaric saw visions of himself in the future, a

prominent member of the House of Commons, and appropriating all Kaia's potential enthusiasm.

He made for Kit O'Leary, and tried to get an invitation to Pat's little dinner at the House that evening. But Kit saw deeper than Alaric guessed, and his efforts were in vain. He found P. O. L.'s Irish good nature proof, too, against his broad hints, and wondered what could be the reason.

In the end he allowed himself to be carried off by a rich man who bought pictures and gave splendid dinners at Prince's, the Savoy, and such public places. This dinner was an impromptu affair, got up on the spur of the moment to celebrate Alaric's success. Several critics were invited, and certain stray congenial spirits, not otherwise engaged.

Sebastian Blythe was one of them. But it was noticed that Sebastian was not in good form—that he seemed preoccupied, and shivered more than usual.

Alaric was preoccupied, too, for he could think of nothing but Kaia. The intoxication of his success and of the compliments and congratulations poured upon him seemed tame in comparison with the intoxication of his love, which filled him and tied his tongue; for how could he speak of Kaia and of the delirious expectation which made him live only in the morrow? And what was there besides of which he cared to speak? He felt sorry that he had not dined with his mother, who would have understood his mood and would have responded to his confidence or else respected his reticence. Or, failing his mother's company—and he remembered that Doda had not seemed at all herself the latter part of the Show, and was probably overdone—he regretted that he had not gone alone to a little foreign restaurant that he knew, where he might have eaten in peace, and afterwards have betaken himself to his own studio to smoke cigarettes and dream of Kaia.

The other guests, however, made the dinner sufficiently hilarious, and it was late when the party broke up. Two of the men were going on to the ball at Chaunterell House; and for the first time in his life Alaric envied Sebastian Blythe, who was one of those bidden, and who would see Kaia in the glory of her beauty and her famous pearls, outshining every other woman present.

No matter, thought Alaric. He might be disappointed of the night, but the morrow was secured to him.

And when he left Prince's, he wandered through the streets in a delicious dream, scarcely knowing how far he went or whither. It must have been instinct that towards midnight pulled him up at the great gates of Chaunterell House. There he stood amid the crowd, watching the carriages file by, hoping that amongst the glimpses of fair faces and gleaming jewels rising above clouds of lace and tulle he might get a fleeting vision of one face more lovely than the rest, set upon a proud, slender neck twined with great pearls.

At last he beheld that for which he longed. The light from a cluster of lamps on the gate-post seemed to converge on the window of Kaia's brougham, and showed her to him most distinctly as she sat bending a little forward, her eyes fixed dreamily on the night. At first, so steadfast was her gaze in his direction that he thought she must have seen and recognised him; then he knew that this was not likely, for he had drawn back from the murmuring throng, and was lost behind the iron gate in the shadow of a granite pillar against which it hung. Moreover, it was evident that Kaia's thoughts were far away. There was a pause of a few moments while other carriages blocked the passage. He observed the smile on her lips, and knew that, had she seen him, she would certainly have made some sign. But she might have been the Kaia of his 'Invocation,' summoning her spirit messengers from

the Pass. She seemed recalled to herself by a remark of her father, who leaned forward and spoke inaudibly, and by a voice in the crowd saying, 'That's the Australian girl who won Kilburra! My! ain't she a stunner!' whereat Kaia blushed, shrank back, and was lost to his view. Alaric boldly wondered if she, too, had been looking forward to their meeting on the morrow, and if that was why her face was so tender and expectant, and why her eyes shone with a radiance deep and soft as the glow of her own pearls.

The policeman called; the carriages in front moved on. Mr. Aldenning's coachman flicked his horses, and the beautiful vision passed. Almost immediately after it had gone by a hansom drew up. The crowd shouted again. A cold, clear profile was outlined for a moment against the darkness, and it seemed to Alaric that this face had caught some reflection of the glow in Kaia's eyes—a light of dreamy joy not common on the features of Gavan Sarel. It was his hansom which had followed the Aldennings' carriage.

And now the gates of Chaunterell House had no longer any interest for Alaric. He turned away and walked the streets again, always with the ecstatic fancy that a shadowy Kaia walked beside him.

* * * * *

Not a word was spoken as Sarel led Dorothea out of the gallery and through the crowd on the pavement. A hansom was passing, and he hailed it, motioning to the driver to draw up a little beyond the crush. Her hand tightened upon his arm, and, turning to her, he was alarmed at the deadly whiteness of her face; he thought she was going to faint.

'You are ill?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, I am ill. I want you to come with me to my house.' The faint dissatisfaction in his eyes maddened

her. 'Can you not spare me this one half-hour? I demand it as my right. I demand it—do you understand?'

'That is not like you, Thea. Of course I will come. How could I leave you when you are not feeling well! It was only that for the moment I remembered Herbril and the waiting deputation.'

He handed her into the hansom and followed, giving the direction through the window in the roof. She leaned back, her eyes persistently turned from him, so that he could only see her profile, which was set and still ashen. She knew as well as though he had spoken aloud what was passing through his mind—knew that he was trying to stave off the tragic issue, and allowing trivial details to drift forward in his thoughts. She knew that he was noticing the slight flabbiness she herself had remarked that morning, marring the contour of cheek and chin; the faint wrinkles at the corners of nostril and eyelids; the faded complexion which he was contrasting with Kaia's exotic bloom. He was a man intensely susceptible to such influences. Wit and charm in woman counted with him for much, the perfection of physical beauty for more. She had caught him and held him by her beauty far more than by her intellect. He had loved the tendrils of hair upon her forehead, the fine tracing of her brows, the curl of her lashes and the strange fascination of her blinking eyes. He had often said that her throat was like the throat of a Greek statue, and that no skin could be more velvety in texture than hers. But how apparent to herself it had been to-day that in all these things Kaia immeasurably excelled her! She hated Kaia; yet if Kaia were Alaric's wife she would love her. There would be no more of this torturing jealousy. If it were only possible that she had been mistaken, and that Kaia meant to marry Alaric!

They had turned on to the Embankment. She made a gesture to him to stop the cab just before it reached her house, and, going forward, unlocked with her latch-key the side-door to the studio. He was keeping the hansom, but she imperiously bade him dismiss it, and waited for him at the foot of the models' staircase. He mounted it close behind her, and the tapestry fell after them.

They were alone in the room of memories. It looked very trim and orderly; it had not been used that day. A great bowl of primroses gave out the scent of spring; an unfinished portrait was on the easel. Everything was so quiet that the place seemed ghostly; the heaped cushions on the long low divan had not been disarranged. The window stood wide open; and, set as in a frame, the gray river swept down its burden of craft—the steamers leaving behind their yellow trail and eddy, the great coal-barges gliding silently, slowly, and suddenly disappearing.

Sarel laid down his hat, and stood by the fireplace, his arms folded, his eyes dull steel, his lips fixed, coldly passive. Evidently he accepted the inevitable, and was braced to meet what he knew must come.

Dorothea made a little gasping sound as though she needed air. Big Ben boomed five; the solemn strokes were as a knell of fate. Dorothea threw off her cloak, and removed her hat, heavy with its plumes. Her dress was very pretty; she looked younger, but her hair was flattened upon her forehead. Sarel gave a little smile, half cynical, half indulgent, as she ran her hat-pin through it, trying to raise it becomingly. That feminine touch in her affected him in a manner almost inconceivable. She caught up a scarf of old lace lying upon a chair and threw it over her head. His remark, 'Now you look like yourself; that's very becoming,' fortified her.

‘Gavan!’

‘Thea!’

‘Are you a man or a cold-blooded monster?’

‘By my soul, at this moment I am both!’

‘Have you got a soul? No, you haven’t. There’s a part of you that’s a sort of Caliban, and nothing else. I hate you for it, and yet it’s made me——’

The sentence stopped unfinished. She went close to him, a dangerous glitter in her eyes; they didn’t blink now, and his were no longer dull steel. Like foes the two confronted each other, weapon measured against weapon, her chin protruding a little, something ferocious quivering in him as his breath came hard.

‘Made you what?’

‘Hate myself, too.’

‘That wasn’t what you were going to say.’

‘No.’

‘You were going to say it was the brute in me that made you love me.’

‘Yes.’

‘*You* called it out. You have your own. I’m two men. One man in me loves *you*; the other loves—an angel.’

She gave a cry scarcely rising above her breath, but piercing, and her frame shook as though a lance, hurled violently, had transfixed it, making it quiver.

‘You’d better have killed me than said that.’

‘It’s true; but perhaps that’s not your fault. I’m a brute, because I’m half a madman. There’s a secret which I’ve never told anyone in the world but you.’

The two masks had dropped. Now in antagonism, as before in alliance, their souls were bare. It was a strange testimony of the power of each over the other, that they had but to come nearer together for the very primal human elements to begin raging. The long look

they gave each other was in itself force striving against force. And yet the irresistible attraction prevailed.

Certainly there was a strain of the madman in Sarel. He went closer, drawn as if against himself. With lips fresh from Kaia's innocent kiss, with vows still hot and deeply graved on the inner and better man, with a heart thrilling high to the pure harmonies of Kaia's nature, and with all the holier instincts which make marriage sacramental roused for the first time within him, he held out his arms to Dorothea in a passionate gesture, and as the waterspout meets suddenly the rising wave, she was clasped within them, lifted off her feet, held close to him, mouth to mouth, breath mingling with breath till the two seemed as one.

When, with an equal impetuosity, he released her, she had the look of a woman who was dead and is alive again, young, vital, and beautiful—a great joy in her eyes.

'You love me! you love me!' she cried. 'You cannot leave me; you dare not leave me.'

Then, for his arm was encircling her, he flung her away, almost with violence, so strong was the revulsion. A torrent of words burst from him.

'No, I don't love you,' he cried, with a passionate frankness most unusual in that cold, self-contained man. 'I'll tell you the truth as it now seems to me, though before Heaven, where you are concerned, I cannot say how much of what I feel is truth and how much a lie. . . . Everything seems a lie—everything; except my love for Kaia. She will be my wife; she is my salvation. I wouldn't have married you at any time; you know that; I told you so. But when I looked in Kaia's eyes, when I heard her sweet voice—there's magic in that voice, stronger than any magic of yours—then I said to myself, "This is the angel who will lead me to smoother ways and raise me to honour and truth. This is the woman who shall be queen of

my home and mother of my children." . . . And you're there, standing between us, trying your best, when I'd thought myself free, to lure me back again. And I'm afraid of you; that's the worst of it. . . . I abominate myself for having yielded during one instant to the old fatal feeling. I've never really loved you. . . . I don't love you,' he repeated in angry reiteration, which almost implied a doubt. 'I've loved your body, I've loved your brain; you've helped me in all my lower self, but you've never got at the true spirit of me. I believe that while I've kissed you with my lips I've hated you with my soul. . . . Oh, you've had a fascination for me; I don't deny it. Often I've resolved to fight it, and it's got the better of me. God knows that only a minute ago I had a proof that it is not conquered yet. But I'll kill it; and I'll kill you, if need be, in the killing of it. I told you that I was a third part brain, a third brute, and the rest madman, and in all three parts of me you wake the devil. . . . You white witch, what does it mean? How have you held me all these years? What is the secret of your fascination? . . . Why is it that, try as I will, I cannot escape from you? . . . Sometimes I've thought——'

He paused, took an irresolute step nearer, and stopped again, his eyes fixed upon her with the vacant glare of a madman's eyes, in which, nevertheless, there is always something cunning and distrustful.

He muttered to himself. She could not at first make out the words; they seemed strange and unfamiliar coming from his lips—strange and unfamiliar from the odd thick way in which he spoke them. Then suddenly she realized that they were not unfamiliar, that she herself, struck by their music, had once quoted them to him, and had been surprised at the wild, fatalistic manner in which he had received them, bidding her passionately never

repeat them again in his hearing, for to him they were an omen and a warning.

These were the words—the refrain of a poem by Béranger, of which she had always been fond, and which in her student days in Paris had distressfully haunted her :

‘ . . . Encore une étoile qui file,
Qui file, file, et disparaît.’

Twice now Sarel repeated them. Then he blazed up at her in new fury.

‘ Yes, why should I not tell you my thought? It has been with me continually—ever since the day when I first met Kaia. . . . I see the star—my star which should lead me to victory—which *shall* lead me to victory. I see it flickering at first, and then burning brighter and brighter till it is almost a sun. And then I see a shadowy form which hides its light, and a hand plucks it from space. . . . I see it falling, falling, flaming as it falls, and fading to nothingness. It passes—the warrior star—“qui file—qui file—file—et disparaît.” . . . You are the shadow which hides my glory. . . . You are the archangel of evil might, which would hurl my star into the Abyss. It is your hand which would bind the sweet influence of the Pleiades and loosen the bands of Orion!’ He gave a laugh which made her believe him to be a madman indeed. ‘I tell you,’ he cried, ‘if you are Lucifer, I am Michael, and I will wrestle with you even unto Hell.’

He flung the sentences at her as though each had been a javelin, launched with maniacal fury and intent to wound her to the death. She stood speechless, with staring eyes and white lips, like one whom horror had turned into stone. Then she knew that the curtain before the door had been lifted and had fallen again; she heard his footstep creak on the wooden stair; she heard

the outer door close upon him, as she then believed, for the last time.

* * * * *

It was half an hour later when Sebastian Blythe, asking admittance on the plea of a pre-arrangement with Mrs. Queste, and assuring the parlourmaid that he knew for a certainty of her return to the studio, followed immediately upon the announcement of his name.

Dorothea was pacing like a beast in a cage the small circuit of that screened recess where she kept her printing-press and etching tools. She had made for it with the instinct of a wounded animal run to earth. She had no time to compose herself, and, in truth, the necessity for doing so scarcely occurred to her; this cataclysm which had overswept her had been too overwhelming. At that moment she could have slain Gavan Sarel with her own hand, and would have exulted before the whole world in the deed. Sebastian came straight round the screen, and they stood face to face. He could not repress a start of horror. Had he beheld her in the hands of executioners, stretched upon the rack, extremity of anguish could not have been more plainly written upon her features. There was a sweat as of agony upon her forehead; the skin of her lips stretched tightly over her teeth, giving her an uncanny look, and her eyes glittered wickedly. The witch-like impression was increased by the effect of the lace she still wore round her head, and which now and then she almost tore, in the nervous clasping of her fingers at her breast.

‘It has driven her mad!’ was his inward exclamation.

An inspiration came to him. He had not been quite certain of his ground; now he was absolutely sure of it.

‘Forgive my intrusion,’ he said. ‘You see, I have forestalled our appointment for to-morrow. My excuse is that I had news which I knew would be of interest to

you. I fancy, however, that my news has been forestalled also.'

'Why?'

'Because Gavan Sarel left you a short time ago.'

'How do you know that?' she asked fiercely.

'I happened to be loitering on the Embankment, and saw him come out.'

She turned on Sebastian with the look of a goaded creature. Somehow she reminded him of a panther whose cub had been shot, with which he had once come to close quarters.

'This is not the first time you have happened to be loitering on the Embankment when Gavan Sarel was with me,' she began fiercely, and stopped, a pucker of perplexity on her forehead, her gaze becoming curiously vacant. 'Gavan Sarel—did I say Gavan Sarel?' She raised her hand helplessly to her head. 'What am I trying to remember? . . . Something comes back to me. . . . Where am I? Who—who are *you*?' She stepped closer to him, her eyes no longer vacant, but wild and accusing. 'I know—I should beware of you. I have been warned. . . . There's no saying whose turn will come next. False witness is your livelihood. No one in this city is ever safe from informers.'

Sebastian looked at her in some concern, deeply puzzled.

'I don't quite follow you; you use such odd expressions. What have you been reading lately? Things you say seem somehow more applicable to Imperial Rome than to modern London.'

Again Dorothea put her hand to her forehead, after the manner of one awaking from a dream; but the dream-impressions remained, clashing with those of the real world. The queer clairvoyant look was in her eyes, and she spoke in a dazed manner.

‘Reading? . . . I don’t know anything about reading. Something escapes me and comes back, and I can’t get it clear. . . . You *are* an informer; everybody knows that. . . . You needn’t think, though, that I would banish all the informers.’ She laughed shrilly. ‘People were frightened of them in Rome, but they were very useful to some—especially to women who wanted to be revenged on men who had injured them. . . . Now *who* are you? There were so many . . . I remember. . . . Yes, there’s one man I remember very well. He was the husband of Hippias; and you wouldn’t have believed that Hippias was jealous, but that was her way of showing it. She *was* jealous, I assure you. . . . You know it was Hippias who—— Oh, why cannot I get it clear?’

Dorothea halted again, swaying dizzily, and catching at an easel as if for support. He gazed at her in amazement.

‘I don’t know what you are talking about. . . . Hippias? I never heard of her. You have got your mind confused, I suppose, over some novel you have been illustrating—about old Rome.’ Then he added with suddenly inspired craft: ‘Excuse me. Of course, I ought to have recollected. I’m a little rusty nowadays. What about Hippias?’

‘Hippias!’ Dorothea repeated, still struggling to recover the memory of her dream. ‘Yes—how Hippias bored me with her gladiators. Fancy letting a gladiator make love to one! Faugh!’

She made a motion of disgust. Suddenly a shrill cry broke from her lips, and she put up her hands as though to shut out some scene of horror. He heard her mutter to herself disconnected words, and felt more than ever certain that she had become temporarily deranged. Presently her hands fell nervelessly. She stood for a moment lost in puzzled reverie, trying, as it were, to follow some

inward clue ; then her eyes blinked at him dully, and she said in a bewildered, hesitant way :

'You know very well it was her doing. You said so. She had a grudge against him because of having lost money on that horse.'

'Of whom and what are you speaking ?'

'You told me. . . . It was the Prefect. . . . Oh ! if I could have given him to the beasts too !'

The smothered rage in her voice broke out.

'How your mind runs on Rome !' he said. 'That comes of working too hard on the Agrippina pictures,' This explanation occurred to him as simple and natural. He carefully steered her mood. 'We were talking about the informers. Well, as you say, they had their uses then, especially for women who wanted to get rid of inconvenient husbands or to be revenged on faithless lovers.'

'*Then!* Why not now ?' she exclaimed in low, quick accents. The dazed expression was gone. She looked alert again — malignantly alert, he thought. She repeated louder and more deliberately, 'If then, why not now ?'

There was method, he perceived, in her madness. His own vague purpose took definite shape and received new impulse. He fancied that he knew what he meant to do.

'Oh, naturally. If then, why not now ? Human nature has not changed in eighteen hundred years. Old Rome—modern London. It's the same play which goes on being played over and over again. The usual three acts of it—love, betrayal, revenge.'

He watched the storm in her bosom swelling. She said in a vehement whisper :

'But when you come to revenge—a woman is so helpless.'

'Not at all. The deadliest blow is always dealt by a woman, because she can strike unseen.'

‘Oh, you are mistaken. A woman’s hands are tied. She’s held down by dread of what she must risk—position, reputation, money. All *that* wouldn’t so much matter. But when there’s something dearer that has to be risked’—her voice lowered—‘when there’s the reputation of her son—his respect for her at stake! A mother cursed by her son! Think! Impossible! Oh, she *is* helpless! she dare *not*—she cannot strike!’

Dorothea resumed her agitated pacing. He took up her words.

‘She dare not strike, but another may strike for her.’

He made a deliberate pause. She turned, still moving.

‘Who?’ she asked.

‘Who better,’ he answered, ‘than a man who loves her and hates his rival?’

Dorothea stopped suddenly, her eyes questioning eagerly. Sebastian went on.

‘What do you say? Suppose yourself that betrayed woman: could you employ a surer instrument of revenge?’

‘I think not. . . . But . . . it might be difficult to find—that instrument.’

‘Not for you. The instrument is here.’ He struck his breast melodramatically. ‘It is waiting, ready, anxious to serve your thought. Only the sign is needed.’

‘The sign? Oh!’

Suddenly she made a strange swift gesture with her hand outstretched, the thumb pointed downward to the ground. The movement was so quick, so apparently automatic, that for some instants he hardly grasped its significance. When he did so he laughed in a dry way, which brought her to herself. She gave him a startled look, and seemed to have no consciousness of what she had done,

'I admire your subtlety,' he said. 'How you have steeped yourself in the Agrippina atmosphere!'

'I am not talking about Agrippina,' she replied, with the petulance of one whose nerves are strained to their limit. 'I want to know your ideas about—about that kind of revenge.'

'Will you sit down, then, and let me tell you a story? It's a little drama which during the last year or two has been unfolding itself, and which came to a climax to-day.'

He saw that the nervous tension was relaxing. She trembled, and her lips chattered soundlessly.

'You're like me,' he said in a matter-of-fact way: 'you feel the cold. The east wind to-day has been killing. I shivered on the Embankment till my fingers were numb. Do let me light the fire—I see it's ready laid. I, too, always keep my fire ready laid.'

He opened a gold box on his watch-chain and struck a match, which, kneeling, he applied to the kindling in the grate. Presently there was a blaze.

'That's good! Now we shall be ever so much more comfortable.'

He drew round a chair for her, and threw himself upon a low seat on the hearthrug, with his long thin fingers outstretched to the warmth.

'And now I will tell my story. I won't bore you more than I can help.'

'Go on,' she said, crouching forward, her elbows on her knees, her chin supported by her palms, her eyes glowering at the fire.

'There was a man who loved a woman,' he began. 'She was beautiful, brilliant, and a great artist. He was a poor journalist, with just a knack of doing his work pretty well, and of making himself useful to more or less important persons.'

Dorothea interrupted him with an impatient movement of her shoulders.

‘You don’t want to be told all that. . . . Only it explains how this man came to know a good deal about different public men and women. He did interviews for a big paper, which gave him opportunities; and he liked knocking about and studying human nature. Besides, he belonged to rather a smart set—was a gentleman, you know, and used to get secretaryships of one kind and another: rum sorts, as our friend Aldenning would say, especially when they happened to lie outside England. For instance, not long ago he was employed for a short time by Hagan Magrath, the Fenian.’

Dorothea interrupted him with scorn that cut like a knife.

‘You said just now that you were a gentleman.’

Sebastian’s sallow face flushed. For a moment he had forgotten the trap he was laying for himself. He got up abruptly from the stool where he had been sitting, and stood out of the range of her eyes. All his self-possession went. He began to speak incoherently; the sound was like a smothered growl. Dorothea gave a quiet laugh.

‘I know all about the letter that you stole from Hagan Magrath,’ she said.

He made an impetuous step towards her and paused, though still she could not have seen him without turning in her chair.

‘Is it necessary to insult me?’ he exclaimed, anger choking his voice.

She did not move, but glowered on at the flames, while the logs, now kindling, crackled and sputtered.

‘I do not wish to give you offence,’ she answered. ‘When one has dirty work to be done, there’s no use

in grumbling because one's tools are not clean. Only I thought when you said what you did, about being an instrument of vengeance, that we needn't pretend to each other. I don't mind acknowledging that just now I feel more like a fiend than a woman. I've made my own hell, and I'm not sorry to have a fellow-fiend for company in it.'

'Go on,' he cried. 'Say what hard words you please, if it's any relief to you. You're quite right. I'm glad you know at last what *my* hell has been. I'm glad you understand me.'

'No, I don't understand you quite. I'm puzzled why you did not apply to me instead of to Gavan Sarel.'

'To *you* !'

'Oh, we're not pretending now. You see, I know all about the anonymous letter Sarel received just before the elections. There's no need for you to go on with your story. We'll drop figurative language.'

'Very well. I only want to follow your wishes.'

'Thank you. What a pliable instrument! Well, you might have known that Sarel can't do much in the way of hush-money—not, at any rate, till he has been longer in office, or'—she brought out the words deliberately, though she winced in uttering them, as though a nerve were being probed—'or—till he has married Miss Aldenning.'

'It's the thought of that which makes your hell,' he said. 'And now you realize the torments *I've* gone through. That's why I can bear with your jeers. Yes, it shall be blood-money, though not of the kind you insinuate. Ah, Dorothea! when you see how I hold this man's fate in my grip, you'll not quarrel with me over the price of his downfall.'

'His public downfall! Is that what you mean?'

She seemed to gloat over the idea. Her chin, still

supported upon her open palms, was poked forward; her bent fingers suggested delicate claws; the almost malevolent glitter shone from between her half-closed eyelids.

‘Yes, I mean the ruin of his political career.’ And Sebastian’s voice rang exultantly. ‘Can you imagine the bitterness of that to such a man as Sarel?—a man who has always made ambition his god! Think how he would feel, after having climbed, fought, and intrigued for power, to find it snatched from him the moment it is well within his grasp. Think of the bolt hurled as he sits unsuspecting in the House of Commons, and the next morning every newspaper clamouring for his disgrace. Think of the mob which cheered him to-day howling him down and rending him to-morrow—the lion’s keeper thrown into its den as prey!’

‘Ah!’ She drew a long breath. ‘That would be giving him to the beasts! Yes,’ she repeated in a low, strange voice, ‘that would be giving him to the beasts!’

Neither spoke for a minute. Then she asked quietly:

‘How do you propose to accomplish his public downfall?’

‘By sending Eustace Olver the letter which Hagan Magrath gave me as an interesting addition to my collection of autographs.’

‘Gave you!’ she cried tauntingly. ‘The explanation does not seem so probable as that you stole it. Oh! Now that I’ve found you out for what you are—and I would not believe it at first—why haven’t you the pluck to stand out and face me, and own up honestly to your villainy? You might meet me halfway, at any rate. I’m not telling lies and making pretences. Oh, for goodness’ sake don’t mumble there behind my

back!' Her manner changed to feeble petulance. 'It's stupid. It annoys me.'

Her words seemed to sting him, but instead of coming to the front he only went closer to her chair, and spoke, leaning over its back :

'I said I didn't care what you said to me, because I see that you're half out of your mind ; but if you think I can stand much more of this, you're mistaken. Your insults are unwarrantable. And if I allowed myself to look you in the eyes while I answered them, you'd madden me so that I should lose my power of self-restraint, and offend you past forgiveness. You accuse me of being a thief. I did not steal the Hagan Magrath letter. He intended me to make political capital of it. He's an underhand brute, and won't hit in the open. . . . He is afraid of exposure and the law courts ; he prefers women's methods. He hates Sarel just as Eustace Olver hates Sarel, and for the same reason—because they were friends once, and Sarel made use of him, and then kicked him over. That seems Sarel's little way of climbing up the ladder. He made use of you while he wanted you politically—to influence Ravage——'

She gave a most pitiful little cry.

'It is not true. Oh, it is not true!'

'It is true. Hasn't his conduct proved it? He only waited till he was in the Cabinet. He has been in love with Miss Aldenning ever since he first saw her. He made use of you, and he has kicked you over.'

'Let that be,' she said faintly. 'Talk of yourself, not of him and me.'

'I must speak of him and you. . . . No matter. . . . You accuse me of being a thief. Well, I admit that I'm a thief, though I didn't rob Hagan Magrath ; but I robbed *you*.'

‘You robbed me of a letter. I know that. When?’

‘I’m not ashamed of telling you I’d do it again in the same circumstances,’ he answered. ‘It was after—when you told me I was not to be admitted any more to your house. I hungered for a sight of you . . . I wanted to explain . . . I hung about the court. One day I watched a model leaving the studio, and saw that she didn’t quite pull the door to after her. There was my chance. I waited a while. The temptation became too strong. I went up the models’ staircase and looked in from behind the tapestry. I saw you on the divan. You were in one of your strange death-like sleeps. Are they trances? This seemed so; the expression of your face was so unearthly. I watched you. By-and-by you stirred, and threw up your arms, and then a letter fell from inside your dress. I saw that it was in Sarel’s handwriting, and I was wild with jealousy at the thought of how you had cherished it. I picked it up, warm from its hiding-place. You would not have kept that letter if you had imagined it possible that a third person would ever read it.’

‘It was——’ She stammered, and her face became scarlet for a moment, then went quite white again. ‘It was——’

She could not finish her sentence.

‘Don’t you know? Have you no recollection of having lost such a letter? When you awoke from your dream—it must have been a strange dream—you said twice aloud, “The closed door!” And then you cried out, “Master! open!”’

‘I remember.’ She seemed to be speaking to herself, and almost as though she were now in a dream. ‘The rhododendron-trees were in bloom, and rain was falling, and the sun shone through the wet mist. . . . And there was something going on in the Temple. . . . But the

letter!' Her dreamy tone became shrill, and she flushed again. 'Oh! I remember. I did not miss it at first, and then I thought I had burnt it. . . .'

'It would have been safer for yourself if you had done so, for your secret was written in it—plainly enough for even the most guileless girl to understand. What fools men of action are when they take up the pen! And Sarel calls himself a statesman!'

Sebastian shrugged with contempt.

She sat silent, sick with shame. That letter, the words of which rose painted in fiery characters before her, seemed to her the strongest proof that her empire had been but over the lower man.

Sebastian went on:

'It told me the secret of the pass-key. I watched that night, and verified with my own eyes what I had read. The next day I went to the States. It was while I was working for Hagan Magrath that the *Hemisphere* commissioned me to travel in the East.'

'And my letter—what did you do with my letter?'

'It had the fascination for me of an unholy charm. I kept it in the hope that it would destroy my love for you.'

She laughed in scorn.

'What a beautiful reason! So high-minded and so poetic! Oh, it was in that hope, was it, that you kept the letter and had a bit of it photographed, and sent the copy to Gavan Sarel—not in the least with any idea of levying blackmail?'

'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'Do you suppose I did it for money?'

'What else did you do it for?'

'Have you no sympathy with a man beside himself from wounded love? Listen. I had come back from the East hoping that I was cured of my love for you. I did my

best ; I flirted with every woman who fell in my way, as Ral humorously related. Much use it was ! The very sight of you, the sound of your voice once more, your new kindness and sweetness, made me madder about you than ever. You know that I've had an insane passion for you these five years and more. Once it got the better of me, and nearly lost me your friendship. Since then I've played a part, and kept my feelings under as far as the outside could show them. Within, I was torn by ravening wolves. I've been through a perfect martyrdom of jealousy. First of Ravage in the old days, then of Sarel. The only comfort was that you weren't free to marry either of them. But I've known ever since I went to Baziria—I kept that dark from Alaric—I've known since then that your husband hadn't many months to live, and I've brooded over my chances, and plotted and schemed how I should get you to marry me, till the idea has got me in possession body and soul. I felt I could only do it by some sort of *coup*. I was pretty sure that Sarel would sacrifice you to his political reputation if there came a question of alternative, and that was what I've wanted to bring about. The thing was to separate you and to frighten him, to show him that he was in the power of an enemy, to make him realize that there would be an exposure unless he gave you up. That was why I wrote that letter. I meant to follow it up with another. Then Kaia Aldenning appeared on the scene, and I very soon saw that Fate was fighting for me with a surer weapon than any I had for the moment at command, and that later on there might be a better use for the letters.'

'You mean the letter which will bring about Mr. Sarel's political downfall—the letter to Hagan Magrath ?'

'And the letter which will destroy his hope of marrying Kaia Aldenning.'

There was dead silence for a moment. Dorothea rose impetuously from her chair, and confronted him.

'Since you will not face me, I will face you. Give me back my letter—now, this moment!'

'That is impossible. I don't take such important documents in my pocket to private views.'

His eyes did not blench now before her wide gaze, in which there was more of horror than of menace or entreaty.

'Let us first think,' he said, 'what the publication of the Hagan Magrath correspondence would mean, practically speaking, to Sarel. Of course, his retirement from the Cabinet and from political life for a time, if not entirely. But that is not death as you would have it dealt.'

'To him it would be worse than death,' she answered.

'Under certain conditions, no doubt,' he returned cruelly. 'But you've got to remember it is for love, not for money, that he has deserted you, and that as Kaia Aldenning's husband, political death might be for him only the beginning of new life.'

He waited, but she stood like a statue, and he resumed:

'A life in which married happiness—children, immense wealth, all the thousand interests springing from these—would go a long way towards consoling him for the loss of political prestige.'

He watched the effect of his words, and saw the silent effort she made to avoid showing how deep his stab had gone. He went on mercilessly:

'Kaia has the primitive instincts. Love is all the world to her. Let him be under a cloud, and she will cling to him the closer—in time rehabilitate him. Money, like faith, can remove mountains. Is it not true?'

She made a slight affirmative movement.

'Yes, you know it is true. And Sarel is not a man to be balked of his career. Block up one outlet, and he

will make another. No, you may give him to the beasts, and an angel will descend and rescue him. He cannot be injured vitally while Kaia loves him, and there is only one way in which to estrange her from him.'

'What way?'

Dorothea spoke in an eager whisper.

'She has odd, unworldly ideas, and something of the savage jealousy. Convince her that her lover, whom she believes to be hers absolutely—not only now, but consecrated in the past—was a short time ago the lover of another woman.'

Dorothea clasped her forehead wildly with her hands, and stood, her head bowed, and her fevered brain following tangled clues as through the mazes of a labyrinth. Sebastian went on quietly :

'Didn't we say the girl had primitive instincts? It would be enough for her to know the truth, and Sarel would lose her for ever. That would be for him the second and the real death.'

Dorothea looked up, letting her hands fall. Then she stretched them, the palms outward, as though beating back an invisible assailant.

'I have told you that it is impossible. I cannot.'

'You love him too well?'

'I do not love him ; I hate him. It is *I* who have the primitive instincts—*I* who am the savage. If I could murder him here, now, and not destroy something which I love better than I have loved him—I'd do it.'

'Well, you can murder him in a subtler way. Why do you hesitate?'

'Because—I've told you. I should destroy something that's more to me even than my hatred of him. I cannot strike. My hands are tied—because——'

'Because you dread the effect upon your son?'

'Don't speak of him. . . . Yes.'

'He should know nothing. The world should never connect you with Sarel's ruin.'

'I tell you I cannot strike.'

'But *I* can. Do you think I don't hate Sarel with an even more deadly hatred than yours? *I* will strike.'

'Not with my letter. Give that weapon back to me.'

'You have my assurance that I will not compromise you. To-morrow by this time the letter shall be in your hands.'

There was a pause, which to both seemed breathless, and even Sebastian had the consciousness of invisible forces battling between them. For nearly a minute the two stood facing each other in the dimness of the studio, which was illumined only by the blaze of a great log of ship's wood, from which leaped flames of blue and green and violet. He, watching her face intently, fancied that from her eyes shone something of the same baleful light, but they were fixed on space beyond him, and for the moment she appeared to have forgotten his presence. The solemn stroke of Big Ben, booming seven times, roused her to herself, and by a trick of association plunged her back into the passionate emotion of that scene with Sarel, and she seemed to hear again the words which had stung her to frenzy: 'Everything is a lie, except my love for Kaia. I've loved your body and your intellect, but I've hated you with my soul . . . I hate you. . . . Of my own will I'll never see or speak to you again.'

'Give me the sign,' said Sebastian.

Once more she raised her arms, and, pointing with her closed hand, made that strange movement of her thumb downward.

'I understand,' he said; 'there is to be no mercy.'

She burst into a shrill peal of laughter, and the words

she uttered made him again believe that for the time, at any rate, she had been driven mad.

‘No mercy!’ she cried. ‘To the lions! to the lions! Send him to the beasts!’

* * * * *

A little before eight, after the dressing-gong had sounded, Dorothea’s maid knocked at the studio door, and, receiving no answer, went in. She was carrying a telegram, and, seeing the place in darkness, it occurred to her that her mistress had not returned from the Private View. She was going away again, when the glow of the dying fire attracted her attention, and made her notice a heap of silk frills and lace on the hearthrug. Approaching the heap, she saw that it was Dorothea lying insensible.

The maid brought her to with some difficulty. This was not the first time that Dorothea had fainted after a day of incessant standing before her easel, and the maid was less alarmed than might have been supposed likely. But Dorothea’s recovery was so slow, and when conscious she seemed so strange and unlike herself, that the maid proposed sending for a doctor. The suggestion roused Dorothea to a violent negative. She inquired for her son, and the maid recollected the telegram, which she handed to her. It was from Alaric, saying that he should not be at home that evening.

Dorothea, bruised, aching in spirit and body, mentally dizzy, and scarcely sensible of anything but of an overwhelming and incommunicable pain, felt her son’s absence a relief. She desired to be left alone, first allowing herself with dazed submissiveness to be laid upon the divan, covered with a rug, and fed with some warm soup. The food only brought back a certain vague remembrance, and intensified the pain and bewilderment of trying to recover her faculties. An awful horror came over her.

What in her madness—for she felt that she must have been mad—had she said or done? She had a dull sense of having been somehow in authority—of having issued stupendous commands. She could not recall distinctly what had happened during the interview with Sebastian Blythe; she had only the impression of something horrible and momentous—of a catastrophe, escaped or impending. Confused images floated before her imagination—pictures in which were masses of human beings, all gaiety and glitter—rather like the crowd at the Private View, but with a feeling of ferocity and devilment beneath the glitter and merriment. There were gorgeous glints of colouring. She saw faces fierce and malignant, as though the emotions she had gone through were after a curious fashion personifying themselves, while her bewildered brain could not grasp their true significance. Her pillows, the coverlid, became impalpably immense. In volumes of fiery cloud appeared the form of Sarel, like the King of Hades, dark, splendid, terrible, the words 'I hate you' hissing from his lips, as, with an expression of loathing upon his majestic features, he thrust her from him, down, down into the Abyss beyond the world.

She felt herself sinking—a lost soul, with no longer any hold upon human realities—sinking, outcast, into blackness unimaginable. Then, through the dark mists, she seemed to hear Charafta's voice, to feel the clasp of his outstretched hand, giving her the same sensation of restoration, of fellowship and support, which he had given her at the private view that afternoon. His words echoed through the fathomless depths of space like certain glorious notes she had heard long ago in the East—the solemn reverberation of a temple bell.

'There is One whose love is infinite, by whom you can never be left desolate. For know, that nearer to you than lover, husband, father, son, stands Asphalion.'

The very name was a spell. As if by some divine magnetism, her tortured senses were lulled to rest. That deep unconsciousness which always preceded her dream of the mountain valley and the closed door wrapped her round, enfolding her in blessed repose. She might have been a terrified child caught into its mother's protecting arms, pressed close to its mother's bosom.

INTERLUDE

IN THE LIFE OF DREAM

DOROTHEA did not awake in the valley of the deodars—that place she knew, of jagged pines, of rhododendron-trees, and of the snow-covered peak. At first she felt hardly alive to her surroundings, so entranced was she by the sense of freedom and lightness and of a power of motion transcending anything she had ever before experienced, even in the dreaming condition. Then she became aware that her hand was still in that warm comforting grasp she remembered, and by her side she now perceived Charafta.

‘I told you,’ he said, ‘that we should meet to-night.’

‘How is it that you are here? And where are we? What am I doing? I can remember only that I was falling, and that you saved me.’

‘I was sent to try and save you,’ said Charafta.

‘From what?’ she asked. ‘I have the confused feeling of some indescribable calamity—of a burden of sorrow which I could not bear. But it has fallen from me.’

‘God grant for ever,’ said Charafta.

‘Tell me what and where we are,’ she said, looking at him in wonderment. ‘I know that I must be out of my body; therefore I know that you cannot have come in the flesh.’

‘Do you not remember what I told you of the several bodies in which enlightened man may function? My body of flesh is now securely asleep on the sofa of my sitting-room,’ he replied. ‘Shall I show it to you?’

Instantaneously she beheld the man she knew, stretched, as he had described, in placid slumber upon a couch drawn close by the fireplace of a room she did not know, but which was lined with books, and furnished like the sitting-room of a student. Then she looked again at the man beside her, who appeared more living than that recumbent form. He was dressed as she had seen him at the private view; she, too, wore the same gown that she had worn there. This fact struck her somehow as comical, and by an odd connection of ideas there occurred to her the argument of the late George Cruikshank against ghosts, that they always appeared dressed after some sort of fashion, and that, though there might possibly be the ghost of a man, there could not possibly be the ghost of a garment.

Again Charafta answered her unspoken thought.

‘Not at all. The objection is ridiculous, and showed that he knew nothing whatever about ghosts. All matter has its counterpart in more rarefied matter still, and all matter in this ultra-physical state of existence is subject to will. Therefore, *think* what costume you please, and you will immediately be clad in it.’

‘Why,’ said Dorothea, ‘that is the dream-science of “Peter Ibbetson.” Of course I knew Mr. Du Maurier when he was alive. I wish I had asked him whether he learned it from personal experience.’

‘Well, you are in working possession of your dream-body,’ said Charafta, ‘and may verify dream-science for yourself. Only to-night we have something to do far more serious than that.’

And now she began to realize the strangeness of the

world in which she was moving. It was her own world; the appearance and conformation of it were to all intents the same, yet every object she beheld had attributes not perceptible in what she called—erroneously, Charafta told her—the real world. Or was it that her capacity of vision was abnormally extended, so that instead of seeing things, as it were, against a flat background, she now saw through and around and above them simultaneously.

It appeared that the sea was below her. But she saw not only its surface: the depths were revealed also, and in them strange and terrible things. She saw with that penetrative power, that comprehensive fourth-dimensional faculty of seeing through and around, wrecks of skeletons, weed-grown treasure, wonderful marine growths, skeletons among which fishes swam, and the ill-shapen bodies of great monsters of the deep. She shuddered, and as in spirit she turned away her eyes from the horrors, another scene opened before her. She saw a plain with Oriental cities and a river, and, looking questioningly at Charafta, was informed by him that this was the Valley of the Indus.

'Mr. Charafta, where are you taking me?' she asked.

'To a place that you have only seen as yet from the outside—the temple in which Asphalion's pupils are taught.'

'Shall I see Asphalion?' she asked.

'I have no knowledge on that point,' he answered, 'and can only repeat that it is for the Master to reveal Himself to His disciples.'

'You told me that I had once been his disciple. I remember it all now—that strange dream of my Greek life in which I broke my priestess's vows, and you, my father, spoke to me of the writing against me, and of the ordeal that I must pass through—two dreary lives of expiation before I might tread the Path anew. Oh, tell me now! I have seen the Greek life in which I sinned.

Have I suffered only half my punishment? Must I live again another life of wretchedness before I can enter in through the Door that is closed?

‘No,’ he replied. ‘The term of your sentence is almost completed. Between your Greek life as the inspired priestess—the Pythia of the Temple, the mouthpiece of One greater than Asphalion—there was another life of sin and tragedy—your life in Imperial Rome. This is what you are permitted to see to-night. It is your privilege as an Initiate in the past to make your choice for future lives, with full knowledge of the Circle of Causes which are working themselves slowly out in fulfilment of your destiny.’

Now, as he ceased speaking, Dorothea saw that they were among ice-crowned mountains, very lonely, and with gloomy forests of pines and snow-fed rivers that rushed between walls of rock, dividing peak from peak. It seemed strange to her that in these freezing passes she should not suffer from cold, till she remembered that her dream-body was independent of physical sensations. They traversed the region swiftly, for though she knew that in this fourth dimension time and space were hardly measurable, it appeared but a few seconds during which the mountain range was passed and a vast uninhabited waste left behind, till mountains again rose on the horizon, and they were in the valley she had already visited, ascending—always with that wonderful sense of freedom and lightness—the hill-path between the rhododendron-trees towards the fringe of silvery firs. But this time, the serving-man in woollen tunic and hide shoes did not meet her as on former occasions. There was no need of his services, for she had clear in her mind that Charafta was well acquainted with the locality, and required no guide to Asphalion’s temple, whither he was leading her.

Did Asphalion's temple belong to the dream-world, or was it a physical fact? She asked him that question. The rocks, the hillside, the rhododendrons, and the rushing torrent seemed real enough. Was the temple real, too?

'As real as the Pyramids,' he answered, 'and, unlike the Pyramids, still consecrated to its ancient uses.'

'And where is it?'

'In the mountain plateau of Central Asia,' he replied, 'the cradle of the Aryan race. But even the European Servers would be unable to reach it in their physical bodies, and neither Svenhagin, nor young Landor, nor the old Abbé Huc, came within knowledgeable distance of the ring of mountains which protect it from profane intrusion.'

'You speak of the European Servers,' said Dorothea. 'I now begin to understand dimly why you and Angela Winterbourne only smile and are silent when Lady Tregellis and Rosalys Thane question you about your mysterious Brotherhood and its unknown Head. Are there, then, a number of people, apart from those in London, vowed to the service of Asphalion?'

'The pupils of Asphalion are to be found in all parts of the world,' replied Charafta. 'But though Asphalion, Himself Divine, is, speaking humanly, their Head, even He is a Server of the Greater Teachers.'

'The Greater Teachers!' repeated Dorothea.

'Do you not know that from the beginning of the world, Heavenly Teachers have existed, commissioned by God to instruct and aid struggling humanity?'

'You mean,' she said, 'such teachers as Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha?'

'Christ is Lord of all in Heaven and earth,' answered Charafta reverently. 'Our Master Asphalion is His Server; and we, who in our humble degree call ourselves Servers also, work to do His holy will.'

‘Then you are Christians,’ said Dorothea, ‘and in no way different from the priests appointed under the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope of Rome?’

‘There is the Power spiritual, and there is the power temporal,’ replied Charafta with his enigmatic smile, which even in her dream condition slightly irritated Dorothea. ‘All human forms of government, the traditional divine right, hereditary rulership of Kings, the authority of the priesthood, are but shadows of the Great Celestial Hierarchy. There is, and has ever been, an invisible priesthood, whose sway and sphere lies in the unseen world. Our earthly priesthood is but a shadow of the higher one. That one has its degrees, its orders of merit, its lower servers, and its hierarchs, graduating in an ascending scale of wisdom and power.’

‘But I want to know about the Servers,’ she exclaimed impetuously. ‘I wish to join the band of Servers. I desire to be Asphalion’s pupil. Tell me, what are the rules and conditions of the Brotherhood?’

‘There are no obligatory rules,’ replied Charafta—‘no conditions, as you in mundane being would understand them. They are determined by degrees of spiritual development, for you must know that Man’s place in the scale of evolution has been created by his own free will in former existences, and cannot be altered by outside gift or favour. The man or woman who, in the course of many noble and loving lives, has evolved somewhat in advance of the race, is launched, at first unconsciously, upon the hastening current. Spirituality, once gained, can never be destroyed. It is by its unconscious or semi-conscious action in ethereal spheres that the dream-body grows into a serviceable vehicle; and the mind, in touch with higher truth, becomes capable of being entrusted with the key of knowledge, the first key giving access to the Master.’

'You told me that I had gained that key.'

'And lost it. Yet it may be regained.'

'Oh, by what means?'

'For you,' he replied, 'by means of Love and Sacrifice. You may perhaps learn something of these to-night.'

They were passing through the walled court of the Temple, in which were some old, gnarled trees and two or three tanks of pure water. The domed building, projecting from the hillside, was approached by a flight of steps going downward, with balustrades, and a coping in the form of a serpent. Set in the door lintel, guarding the portal, were two realistically sculptured cobras. Within, Dorothea beheld a temple of majestic proportions, and severe but curious architecture. It appeared a great circular space, of which the upper end, furthest from her, on entering, was lost in shadow, so that it might have been an immense oval partly excavated in the mountain-side. The open portion was dimly lighted by an aperture between wall and roof, which was blocked at intervals by colossal, three-faced heads of the type of the Egyptian Sphinx, but of an extraordinary sublimity and sweetness. These Divine heads were set on the bodies of gigantic serpents, carved in a smooth-grained white stone almost like marble, which coiled in seven spirals round massive shafts of porphyry. The pillars set near the wall made between the projections a series of large niches in which altars or statues might have been expected to stand, but which were bare and empty of ornament. Indeed, the most noticeable characteristic of the architecture was the absence of ornate detail, and of the gorgeous colouring usually to be found in sacred edifices of the East. Above and beyond each godlike head rose the ribbed hood of a cobra finely sculptured, and making a section of the ceiling, giving an appearance of extreme richness com-

bined with simplicity. The design repeated itself where an inner row of pillars marked off a curved space or nave, these massive porphyry pillars again serpent-twined, in the sevenfold spiral, the three-faced heads bent downward, wearing an expression of supernal calm and sweetness, while the outstretched cobra hoods completed the effect of the roof. Dorothea seemed to know intuitively that these three-faced divinities on the serpent bodies were symbols of an ancient wisdom, the materialized survival of some pure and primitive cult dating from Earth's golden dawn, when gods descended and walked with men.

But she was beginning to discover that in this strange fourth-dimensional world, thought is plastic and visible, having the tendency to mould itself into immediate form, so that her untrained faculties found a difficulty in distinguishing between that which was objective and the subjective creations of her wandering fancy. Like the figures on a magic-lantern sheet, her surroundings seemed to change into chaotic phantasmagoria, and it was only the clasp of Charafta's hand which brought her back to what, for lack of a better term, she called to herself reality.

They seemed now to have entered the bowels of the mountain, for the glorious temple and the serpents with the faces of archangels had vanished, and they stood in a cave-like chamber, lighted in some pale and undiscoverable fashion, so that all its outlines seemed shrouded.

Charafta released her hand.

'Oh, do not leave me!' she entreated. 'Remember that I am as a child in a strange country, unused to its dangers.'

'Have no fear,' he answered. 'If it were possible that any maleficent influence could approach you in this place, you would be efficiently guarded.'

She saw that his arms were upraised as in the attitude

of a prophet invoking higher agencies. He seemed to her taller, and there was a lofty dignity in the poise of his head and an inspired look in his eyes which made her think rather of the priest of Demeter's temple than of the man of society to whom she was accustomed, who had appeared always to look out on life with an air of kind abstraction, and of benevolent yet slightly humorous toleration, seeming to say that though dwelling in frivolous London, and tenderly compassionate of its follies and weaknesses, he was nevertheless not of that modern world. Dorothea saw also that he did not wear the conventional garb, but was clad in an amply flowing garment of white, resembling the robe of an ancient philosopher.

Dorothea glanced down at her own dress—that which she had put on for the private view—and laughed at its incongruity.

'I should be attired in classical draperies also,' she said.

'That is easily done,' he answered. 'Think of yourself as Herennia, wife of Pompeius Saturninus—a Roman lady of the consular order living in the reign of Domitian.'

Dorothea laughed again, perceiving that to her feet descended the stola with its jewel-clasped sleeves, and the purple stripe of a high-born woman of Imperial Rome.

'If I am Herennia,' she said, 'who, then, were you in that Roman life?'

'I was Umbritius the soothsayer,' he answered. 'And in that life, too, we were more or less associated. I knew you when you were a child, a baby, in the year of your father's consulate, when Marcus Herennius Varena was in the height of his power and popularity, and for that reason was becoming obnoxious to the Emperor Nero.'

'Tell me more about my father,' said Dorothea.

'He was accused of being implicated in the Piso conspiracy, and was not allowed, like Seneca and Lucan, to

choose the manner of his death, but was executed by order of the Emperor, and his property confiscated. Thus it happened that your mother, Junia Verecunda, was plunged from a state of great wealth into comparative poverty. She escaped banishment, and lived on a small property which she owned near Præneste, where you were brought up.'

'It comes back to me,' murmured Dorothea—'the old Rome, towards which I have always felt so strange an attraction; the splendid city, the swollen yellow river, the pomp and pageantry of all that dead life. Now I know why I saw the illustrations for Ravage's book in such clear and coherent pictures; now I know why I seemed to feel and understand Agrippina——'

'Hardly from personal knowledge,' said Charafta. 'You were an infant in the year of Agrippina's murder; but your mother Junia had been her friend, and did not scruple to call Nero matricide. She often talked to you of the magnificent Empress, who was not so bad as Tacitus and Suetonius have painted her. Then, too, your husband Pompeius had known and admired Agrippina.'

'My husband?' Dorothea tried to shake away the mists through which crowds of confused images pressed, the physical and the dream impressions mingling. 'I want to recollect, and I cannot. He seems to be in my life now, and yet I cannot connect him with it.'

'Never mind,' said Charafta, with his sweet, half-humorous smile; 'things will become clear to you presently, and you will readily identify your friend Lord Ravage—your friend in the holiest, truest sense—with Pompeius Saturninus, your Roman husband. Perhaps you may remember that Saturninus was in his time noted as an orator, a historian, and a poet; besides that, as a man of integrity, refinement, and tender domestic affections. Pliny the Younger speaks of him in the warmest terms, and if

you don't know the passage, it would interest you to read what he says in one of his letters about Pompeius' wife, whom he describes as a woman of wit and culture, educated by her husband, who married her young and uninstructed.'

In one great flash the truth was borne in upon Dorothea.

'If I had known! if I had known!' she cried wildly. 'Oh, how blind I have been!'

'It was the blindness of the chrysalis,' answered Charafta, 'closed round by the thick web he himself has spun. So man, in yielding to passionate desire, fashions a shroud for his soul. But the evolutionary moment must come when the soul stirs, and, bursting its swathings, rises to the larger life no longer sightless and bound. There, as from a mountain-top, this freed soul may view its past, and learn the Law of Destiny. That moment has come to you. Your last life will now unfold itself before you, reflected from the imperishable record which is, in truth, the Judgment Book of God. You will see the Greek priestess, still unpurged from the fierce passions that were her ruin, still bound by the tie of a sinful love to one whose doom she is, and who, in his turn, for the appointed time must be the instrument of her punishment, the means of her growth. You will see her born into the gross splendour and riotous power of dissolute Rome, yet always with the struggling nobleness, the heritage of spirituality indestructible. You will see how opportunities were given her of retrieving herself through the affection and counsel of those who, even then, redeemed the corruption of that terrible city. Oh Rome, Rome! nursling of Numa the Adept, Mother of Nations, Instructress of Empires to be, how wert thou fallen from thy great traditions! how deaf wert thou to the warnings of prophets and priests that, even then, foretold thy downfall!'

Charafta's voice swelled into the old rhythmic cadence, as had been its wont when the seer of past ages seemed to overshadow and speak through the lips of the man of to-day, so that it might indeed have been the prophetic voice of Umbricitus in the temple of Apollo bidding the aged and unnerved Cæsar, tremblingly invoking the gods in his hour of danger, to prepare for the enemy who at that very moment was awaiting the conspirators' signal.

'Then,' went on Charafta, 'you may judge for yourself of the manner in which you embraced those opportunities of salvation. You will with your own eyes behold how you forsook the good and returned to the former evil, adding one more sin and calling down a more bitter expiation. Then you will compare that past life with the present, and the actors in that old drama with the men and women who react their Roman parts on this London stage; and then, too, you will understand, but darkly, the meaning of the Law and of the Great Why, and with wider eyes and clearer vision it will be for you once more to choose between the good and the evil—to backslide and wander once again further from the Heavenly Door of which you lost the key, or to enter into the inner Temple and the presence of the Master, received as the humble server of those Mighty Ones with whom is joy and love and eternal peace.'

His voice died away, and in a moment the scene changed, becoming living and luminous. The walls of the cave appeared to melt, and with them the visible presence of Charafta, though Dorothea never lost the sense of his spiritual nearness and support. Again she had the curious feeling of a dual personality, which she had before experienced in the reproduction of her Greek life; so that though she knew herself as Dorothea Queste, invisible and impalpable spectator of events that were dead and done, she knew herself also as the centre and pivot of those

events—the heroine of a drama of which now scene after scene unfolded itself before her.

Carried away at times by their intense actuality, she seemed to step once more upon the old stage, to live again through former soul-tearing passions. The ordeal would have been beyond her strength but for that restraining double knowledge instilled into her, she felt intuitively, by the power of Charafta, and for the calm mastery of the immortal part of her which had outlived the tragedy and triumphed over the sin. Then she would resume the more normal position of a looker-on at some kind of cinematograph exhibition which appealed to all senses simultaneously, she herself remaining unperturbed.

Thus she saw, heard, and intellectually understood the words, movements, and even realized the feelings, of her former self and the actors around her, standing, as it were, upon some vantage-ground of space which removed her from their emotional influence. She was aware that, in the inward manner peculiar, it seemed, to that dream condition, Charafta prompted the discovery and use of this power of self-abstraction. In the same interior manner she seized the knowledge of historical place and period, of names of personages, lapses of time, and the significance of certain facts and details of which under ordinary physical conditions she might have been ignorant.

THE FOURTH ACT
WRIT
IN THE IMPERISHABLE RECORD

THE LIFE OF DREAM

SCENES IN IMPERIAL ROME

IN this manner the pictures thrown upon that luminous shadow-sheet stand forth before Dorothea's eyes with all the appearance of actuality, each remaining for a longer or shorter time, and then vanishing to give place to another.

The first scene rises.

She beholds a great city, and knows it to be Imperial Rome. From her fourth-dimensional vantage space, commanding all points simultaneously, she sees the long straight avenues of tombs stretching from the semicircles of mountains and the flat line of the horizon, and converging at the glittering centre—this central city a confused mass of marble, metal, stone and wooden dwelling-houses, with flecks of verdure upon the mass, and shapes of monuments and pediments of temples outlined against the sky.

Here, above the misty expanse of roof-top, garden and park, through which the yellow Tiber winds like a carelessly-looped ribbon, Dorothea would see the Pantheon's brazen dome, kindled by the sun into a half-globe of fire, or the marble portico of some temple gleaming silvery pale in the light, or like old ivory in the shadow; or Augustus' Forum, an oblong space, its hundred statues towering calm over the busy throng of persons engaged upon their own

legal business, or listening to the pleaders setting forth the rights and wrongs of other causes than their own, Apollo's upreared form dominating all. She sees the great oval of the unfinished Colosseum, begirt with scaffoldings, upon which thousands of workmen swarm like bees, this point of activity cast into sinister shade by a heavy storm-cloud, which rests portentously above the yet roofless building.

She sees the grand pile of the Cæsars on the Palatine, and Diana's temple on the Aventine, and all the splendid mansions and terraces and jewel-like colonnades that make a magnificent pleasure-ground of the Cœlian. She sees the frowning fortress and gloomy walls of the old Capitol; she sees the triple row of Greek pillars, the marble steps, the colossal Jove, and the splendid golden cupola of the newly rebuilt Temple of Jupiter; while further away her eyes wander over the wide level of the Campagna, which seems in itself a straggling city, forming an outer and more thinly spreading zone round the city's kernel—an expanse of rich villas, fruitful farms and lovely gardens, intersected by the streets of tombs and the massive structures of the aqueducts. Further still, beyond the irregular half-circle, which is cut by the line of sea and plain, her view is bounded by the Latian and Sabine hills and the long purple hump and snow-tipped summit of Soracte.

The scene shifts a little, and its central point becomes an outlying track leading diagonally from the Appian Way towards the highroad to Præneste. Dorothea's gaze follows a light two-wheeled cabriolet, drawn by Numidian ponies, which is whirling along this path. She notices that the carriage is ornamented with exquisitely wrought bronze mounts, and that its body and shafts are inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold. Her eyes are arrested by the driver, whom she knows from his retinue

and also from the senatorial toga which he wears to be a person of importance. He is a man in the prime of life, looking older than his years. The face is plain, the features thickened, and the skin marred by small-pox; but the head is fine, the brows intellectual, the lips firm, yet sensitive, the expression kind. Something thoughtful in his mien suggests a scholarly bent. He would be impressive in spite of his plainness and his smallish body, but for a distinct physical deformity—the massive head is set upon crooked shoulders.

. . . Now she sees in the direction towards which the carriage is bound a villa-farm, covering a spur of the hills crowned by Præneste. She observes that the land is poor, the fields badly cultivated, and that the garden and house-front have a neglected look. No wreaths twine the pillars of the portico, the pedestals of the statues are stained with moss, the box hedges are unclipped, and the shrubs, once trimly cut into shapes of animals and geometrical figures, have been allowed to throw out shoots, and are now mere monstrosities. In front of the chief portico the carriage stops.

She is within the house, standing at the entrance to the atrium. Here, there is the same poverty-stricken air. Parts of the facings of coloured marble on the walls have been broken away; the hangings and the rugs spread about on the mosaic pavement are patched and faded. There is a marble basin with a fountain in the centre of the hall, and the Triton in the middle of the basin is well carved; but the water trickles through its mouth in an uneven stream, as though the mechanism were faulty. No fine paintings or works of art adorn the walls; indeed, the vacant spaces give a suggestion of their removal—perhaps to be sold. But there are signs of distinguished ancestry on the part of the owners, in the many waxen masks set in recesses along the side-walls, and in a few warlike trophies

and triumphal relics, which seem to tell of a family that has had its day of power in the State.

The atrium, however, presents a sight to gladden the eyes of any austere Roman of the old school. At the upper end, sanctified by tradition to the Lares and to conjugal and domestic duty, sits the mistress of the establishment, like a matron of old time, directing her female slaves at their spinning-wheels. The slaves look sullen, and take no cheerful interest in their work, looking up and murmuring among themselves, and tittering at the approach of a stranger. One might fancy that the lady of the house is a hard taskmistress, and keeps her women too close to the grindstone to be popular amongst them.

The mistress has been a great lady—is so still, though fallen from her former high estate. Her dress of rich material and old fashion, faded like the hangings, her haughty, discontented manner, the hardness of her once beautiful features, the lines of grief and disappointed ambition, and the shrewish twist of the mouth, all speak of misfortune; yet in this somewhat melancholy personality there is to Dorothea a curious and pathetic attraction. She is the only one of the group who seems alive; and as Dorothea watches her with strangely-quickenened interest, it is as though some thrill of recognition, some vital recollection on her side, acts upon and stirs the dream-puppet, turning it into a breathing, speaking woman. This same vital link binds Dorothea also to the man she has seen in the carriage, and who is now ushered in by a slave in shabby livery. He advances and makes a salutation, dignified and not without a certain ease and grace, in spite of the physical disadvantages under which he labours.

‘Greeting to thee, Junia Verecunda!’

The matron returns his salutation, extending her

hand, which he formally kisses. But her manner, though dignified also, is cross and ungracious.

‘Greeting, Pompeius Saturninus! It is long since thou hast thus honoured my poor house. But I can scarcely wonder that this abode of decayed fortune should offer small attraction to one whose palace is the meeting-place for all the fashionable wits of Rome. Only just now, Umbritius was saying that thy supper-parties are too gay to suit his sober taste.’

Saturninus smiled in gentle deprecation.

‘Umbritius, Domina, belongs, like thee, to the old school. He follows the lead of his friend Juvenal in railing at the falsity and extravagance of modern Rome. But I am more of Pliny’s way of thinking, that, living in a foolish world, one had better make the best of it, and not try to reform society by forsaking public business and shunning clever people because they happen to be intimate with the young Cæsars.’

‘You rebuke me,’ says Junia sourly. ‘I do not pretend to know anything about society in these days. Times have changed, and so have manners: not that they were much to boast of when that monster Nero was alive. But I, like Umbritius too, am sickened of the whole show. Oh that I could say the same of Herennia, who is pining for Roman gaieties.’

‘Herennia!’ exclaims Pompeius eagerly, and, coming a step nearer, seems about to ask concerning Herennia, but checks himself, and replies in more measured tones:

‘Domina, thou art wrong in supposing that want of inclination has kept me from thy house. I have, it is true, been much occupied of late in canvassing for a friend who is candidate for a prætorship, as well as in pleading before the Hundred; but these matters would not have hindered me. There were other reasons. Junia Verecunda’—he spoke in a lower and less even

tone—'if my heart said truly, it would assure thee that for me the greatest attraction Rome could offer does not compare with that which draws me hither.'

Junia Verecunda gives him a keen look, which has in it a trace of cynical interest.

'Then I trust thou mayest persuade Herennia that her home has something to commend it. Thou shalt tell us what is thy attraction.'

Pompeius flushes slightly and hesitates, deterred by the curious looks and meaning smiles of the slave-girls. Junia administers to them a sharp rebuke.

'These good-for-nothings neglect their work to gape at their betters. We will talk elsewhere. Come with me, Saturninus, into the study, which overlooks the garden, where thou wilt see Herennia, who is receiving a lecture from Umbritius.'

As things move in a dream, the background changes. Junia Verecunda is seated in a large marble chair beside an open window, which looks upon a terrace set with dilapidated statues and empty urns, and beyond, to the garden closed in by an ilex walk and a grove, within which may be seen glimpses of a small temple. Pompeius' gaze turns to a sequestered court between yew hedges, at right angles with the window, and arrests itself at the fish-pond.

Here, standing by the marble ledge of the tank are a man and a girl. The man, no longer young, has a flowing beard and wears a philosopher's cloak. He is talking earnestly to the girl, who is throwing pieces of wheaten cake into the tank, and amusing herself in listless fashion with the leaps of the fishes, which crowd round for food, while she listens at first in apparent discontent, then with a sudden gleam of interest, to

what the old man is saying. She is very handsome, tall, high-bred-looking, with a quantity of amber-coloured hair, a statuesque face, cold and bored in expression, and eyes large, dark, and full of light and intelligence. Her movements show a certain repressed exuberance; her lips curve disdainfully. She makes one think of some beautiful, half-tamed creature of the forest, caged and panting for liberty.

‘What has Herennia done that Umbritius should be deputed to lecture her?’ asks Pompeius.

‘Thou mayst well say deputed. I had to beseech him almost with tears. Umbritius is too tender-hearted toward that wayward child. He reproves me for punishing her—bids me rule by love, not fear, and would have me submit to her tempers without correcting them. Ye gods! When I have submitted patiently to the murder of my Varens and the loss of all my wealth, shall I be tormented by my daughter’s froward moods?’

‘Tell me, if thou wilt, why is Herennia froward? What is it that she desires?’

‘What is it that she desires? The gods alone know! I can tell thee a few trifles to begin with, such as jewels from the East, pearls from Britain, gold-embroidered robes, and silken stolas; perfumes from Cosmus, yellow-haired waiting-maids, six Ethiopians to her litter, and liveries to equal the smartest in Rome. Oh, there’s no limit to her desires. Present me with ten millions of sesterces, and I’ll undertake to gratify the most modest of them; or find me a husband for her with the fortune of a Proconsul and a generous disposition.’

‘That might not be difficult. Herennia is very beautiful.’

‘And she knows it, and chafes at the lack of opportunity to display her charms. Though she pretends that it is her mind she wishes to cultivate, and that she cries

for Rome because there she may attend lectures, practise music, and meet orators, rhetoricians, poets. Was ever such absurdity? She would have me sell the farm and take a lodging in the city. I, who once owned a palace in the Carinæ, to climb three flights of stairs, like your friend Martial, to a mean apartment near the Tiber! As well emigrate at once to the Suburra!

'Permit me, Junia. My house is at thy disposal.'

'Thou art most kind, friend Saturninus; but I am not accustomed to being a pensioner. And what should I do in Rome? Am I to crawl in my rags to the feet of such sycophants as Regulus and Fabricius Veiento and Eprius Marcellus—thou shouldst know what Umbritius thinks of the set—beseeching their good offices with the Cæsars—those Flavian boors! Little use that would be, since I cannot pay the parasites for their services. No! Herennia must be content to wait till wooers come seeking her at home. That wooing, I'll wager, is what she has in her mind. Well, well! Have *I* ten million sesterces? Can *I* give her what she cries for?'

'But I can, Domina.'

Junia's hard face relaxes.

'How then, Saturninus?'

'By taking her from thy hearth to mine, if she will consent to hang flax on my doorpost, and to say to me the sacred words which will make us one.'

'Thou wouldst marry the child?'

'I love her, Junia, and that is my wish. Now I will speak my heart to thee. This is why I am here to-day, putting all to the test; to be her servant and thine—her husband, or, if not, a stranger: for I love her too well to remain only her friend. It is for her to decide.'

'No, by the mother-in-law of Dis, it is for me, and not

for her, to decide. Have the laws of Rome been altered, that a chit of seventeen should be delivered from the duty of filial obedience? And why should not Herennia be honoured by thy preference? Why should she not welcome thee as her husband?

‘Because I am twice her age, ugly-featured, scarred, misshapen, and have no gifts of person to recommend me as a lover.’

‘Thou hast beautiful eyes, Saturninus, and winning speech. Thou hast also a noble heart and great talents. Thy verses, I am informed, are considered finer, and are certainly not so long as those of thy friend Flaccus. And in addition to these gifts, thou hast a palace on the Cœlian and rich estates. Thy levee is always crowded. Thou need’st not to solicit patrons for the recital of a new poem, and paid slaves are not wanted to push a way for thy litter. Thou dost undervalue thyself. All this, Umbritius, who is my link with the great world, relates to me.’

‘Umbritius might also tell thee that the crowd of legacy-hunters and parasites surrounds me in the hope that my only boy, who is of fragile health, may be taken early by the gods,’ says Pompeius in soft satire.

‘Well, if thou dost marry Herennia, and Juno grant thee children, thou mayest sign thy will in peace. No doubt Hippias has given to Herennia the tale of thy advantages. I assure thee that thou hast much to recommend thee to her favour.’

‘It is not for my worldly advantages that I would be chosen by Herennia,’ answers Pompeius sadly. ‘I know the misery of a loveless marriage, Junia, and I had vowed that my wealth should never again be a woman’s bait. But my passion has been stronger than my resolve, and I am here. I love Herennia, and because she is young and her heart yet untouched Hope whispers to me that even

I may teach her love. And if I undervalue myself, I rate Herennia's qualities more highly than thou dost. Her longing for pleasure is the innocent outburst of healthy youth; it will pass when gratified. But the joy of art and books will endure, and thus shall we become dear and ever dearer companions. Thou dost not altogether know, Junia, how great is Herennia's capacity. Hast thou read her letters dictated by her own free fancy? Umbritius has shown them to me. Thou wouldst hardly believe with what wit, what felicities of expression, they sparkle.'

'Nay, I would not belittle the child to thee, Saturninus, and it may be as thou sayest, that I do not wholly understand Herennia. She has a strange nature compounded of diverse qualities. With all her worldliness, she has respect for the gods, and when younger would tell of holy visions needing a poet's pen to transcribe them. She was quieter of mood and less wilful in her budding maidenhood; and so fond was she of brooding in the temple yonder before the great statue of Ceres, that it came in my mind to beg the Flamen Dialis—who has noticed her more than once in the processions—to receive her as a temple virgin. That would have been a provision for a penniless girl, and she might have married afterwards, had she chosen. But when I asked Herennia if she would be a temple virgin, some frolicsome madness appeared to possess her, and from that time do I date her increased waywardness. No, she would not be immured within temple walls, nor deny herself lovers and feasting, nor the sight of martial exercises and feats of wrestling: there spoke her soldier father's spirit. Of all the temple virgins, she said she would only be a Vestal. And she would not be a Vestal, but for the allotted seats in the Amphitheatre and the privilege of attending state banquets and of driving through the streets of Rome. Heard'st thou ever

such worldliness? So she grew up, and her passionate will began to show itself. Thou must be told, Saturninus—and it will make no difference to thee, I know, since thou art her lover—that Herennia will brook no denial of that on which she has set her heart, and if one says her nay, it will be the worse for that one. Wouldst thou credit that not long ago she gave the order that a slave who had offended her should be scourged and branded? Hera, forgive! But it is not wise of me to relate to thee the faults of Herennia, for I desire strongly that thou shouldst wed her, and I fear me that I may deter thee from thy purpose.'

'Nothing that thou hast said could deter me. My purpose is formed, and all that thou sayest only convinces me the more, that with me Herennia may be happy: for I shall bring her into the larger life which thou, Domina, hast not had it in thy power to open to her.'

Another voice broke in upon the conversation:

'Thou sayest well, my Saturninus. Yet it is my duty to tell thee that by all omens for thy union with Herennia, the future holds sorrow in store.'

It is the philosopher who speaks—the man who was standing by the fish-pond with Herennia. He has entered silently a few moments ago, and has been an unnoticed listener to the declaration of Saturninus. Outside, the girl still lingers, feeding her fishes.

Junia Verecunda exclaims in half-real, half-bantering displeasure:

'May Ops chastise thee, Umbritius! Why seek to divert the purpose of Saturninus by talk of evil omens, seeing that, though the betrothal be almost certain, the marriage contract has not been signed nor the sacrificial bird inspected—which last is thy business. Thou art a veracious augur, as we all know, and had Galba's wits been keener, when thou didst consult the gods at Apollo's

altar, a cohort of Pretorians and the word given for Otho's head, might even then have saved him the empire. But as concerns the wedding of Herennia, it is not yet time to talk of omens and the will of the gods.

'The Immortals do not speak only by the entrails of beasts and birds,' replies the sage. 'I do not seek to divert the purpose of Saturninus, but to warn him against the dangers to which that purpose points.'

'Say, then, Umbritius, what thy genius bids thee say in regard to the will of the gods,' returns Pompeius. 'I, being a Stoic, hold the decrees of Zeus immutable, though I may take leave to doubt their interpretation by mortal man.'

'Nevertheless, Pompeius,' answers the Soothsayer, 'though it be thy noble philosophy to accept alike fortune and disfavour as unalterably decreed, know that the free-will of man, possessing the essence of divinity, has the power even to change and avert omens, so that in truth, by virtue of that divine essence, man, instead of being the slave of destiny, may become its master. Know, also, Pompeius, that Love has the power to conquer all things. If thy love be strong enough to inspire the like in Herennia's bosom, and to curb the wild impulses of her nature threatening her with evil, that calamity which I see foreshadowed, may be turned aside, and thy union bring to both happiness and peace. But lay my words to heart. It will need much strength to change the course of that which I have foreseen.'

'I thank thee, Umbritius, for thy warning,' answers Pompeius. 'Since thou maintainest that man's will is of the essence of the gods, I take thee at thy word, and oppose my will to destiny. Let me then, Domina'—and he turns to Junia—'plead my cause with Herennia now, before aught is said that might startle her maiden modesty and lead her through waywardness to reject me unheard.'

‘Thou needest not fear maiden bashfulness in Herennia,’ rejoins Junia Verecunda, unable, it would seem, even for politic reasons to control her bitter tongue and her resentment against her daughter. ‘The girl speaks her mind on subjects about which in my youth no Roman maiden might dare to hold opinions. This boldness comes of her friendship with Hippia, Veiento’s wife, whom Herennia met at Aricia when I let her go to worship Diana in the grove of Nemi. It is Hippia who has filled Herennia’s mind with longings for Roman pleasures and with I know not what evil besides.’

‘Nay, Hippia is vain and overlavish in her attentions to gladiators and charioteers, but Veiento gives her cause for jealousy, and that is her manner of revenge. She would not harm Herennia,’ says Pompeius soothingly. ‘Wilt thou give me permission, Junia, to speak of marriage to thy daughter?’

‘Most willingly. Mayst thou prosper.’

‘Thy suit will not take Herennia by surprise,’ says Umbritius. ‘In thy interest, Pompeius, I have said words which have prepared her to receive it. Thou wilt find her not unfavourably inclined; and if she answers thee with a candour that may seem scarce maidenly, lay the blame on me. Better truth with an acid flavour than honeyed dissimulation.’

As he speaks, the girl Herennia passes the window, and presently the curtain veiling the doorway is drawn impetuously aside, and the maiden stands facing them. She is dressed in a simple robe of white wool, rather coarsely woven in horizontal lines, and with the purple border befitting her patrician birth. Over it she wears a palla, also woollen, arranged in the Greek mode. Her amber-coloured hair is knotted also in the Greek fashion, its coils kept in place by a small gold bodkin. Gladly would Herennia adopt the elaborate coiffure of the day, and has

often sighed for that frizzed erection now in vogue under the Flavian dynasty, for the fashionable gold-dust and the services of trained hairdressers such as those whom Hippias employs. But Junia Verecunda frowns on such vanities; moreover, gold-dust is expensive, and her tirewomen are unskilled in arts of the toilette.

To Pompeius, Herennia is more lovely in her simplicity than the most renowned beauty in Rome. Many ladies of the highest society have flaunted their charms before this wealthy, if ungainly, patrician; many women have tried to win him, and all have failed. Never has Pompeius Saturninus been thrilled by a woman's glance as he is at this moment thrilled by that of Herennia.

There is no shyness in her look. Her eyes meet his full, with, as he fancies, wonder and curiosity in their depths, and something of questioning tenderness. Umbritius sees in her look the awakening pride of womanhood, a triumphant sense of power, and withal, a vague compunction; and to both men, and even to Junia Verecunda, there is apparent her strange fascination—a fascination beyond beauty. It is the charm of the incongruous, the unexpected—the combination of almost voluptuous suggestiveness with a mien of maidenly austerity. It is like the imprisonment of some spirit of pure passion in the form of a marble Diana; it is fire masked by ice.

The girl stands now statue-like, except for the intense life in her eyes and the quick heaving of her chest. One arm is thrown back, showing the curve of her bosom; her head is a little raised, giving her an air of queenly expectancy; the beautiful throat is bare, and the still lips proud and sweet. As she so stands, there seems to emanate from her an influence indescribably magnetic, which in different ways affects each one of those beholding her, and appears even to change the spiritual conditions and mental atmosphere surrounding the group.

To Dorothea, invisible spectator, the very air throbs with new life ; the drama becomes individual. With the presence of the girl, and the power radiating from it, her former vague thrill of recognition deepens into a sense of personal participation in the scene before her. It is now a part of herself, and she has the fancy of stepping down upon the stage, and of entering into the body of Herennia, so that the words Herennia speaks are her own thoughts translated, and she is herself vividly conscious of the emotions stirring in Herennia's breast.

She feels, too, in a curiously definite manner the emotions by which these others of the group are swayed. In Umbritius' case, it is sorrowful affection, and the foreboding of the augur blurred by the warm devotion of the man. Adoring love reigns in the heart of Pompeius ; while in the mind of Junia Verecunda soured egotism and a peevish hankering after supremacy denied, do battle with a certain maternal satisfaction tempered by the wish to be rid of a troublesome responsibility.

Herennia's attitude towards her mother is distinctly un-Roman. Resentful, impatient of control, she has a contempt for the lesser intellect which dictates old times and old manners to one essentially modern. Herennia is almost without filial sentiment ; she cares nothing for Sabine virtues ; she yearns for freedom. Through marriage only may she attain it. Pompeius shows her a door out of her prison. She pants for the world, and yet her prophetic instinct makes her afraid with an inward and supernatural dread. She is in no mood for conventional banalities. It is not possible for her to imagine Pompeius a gaoler ; rather does she look upon him as a not disagreeable means to some great unknown end—a goal towards which destiny beckons. The destiny may be a malignant one ; of that she is conscious. Words uttered by Umbritius in the garden haunt her memory ; perturbed visions rise dimly,

evoked by her own mystic foreboding; echoes from a seeress's past voice themselves feebly but deterringly. She feels dazed, standing like one in a dream.

Says Junia Verecunda :

'Pompeius Saturninus desires to speak alone with thee, Herennia, for which he asks my permission.'

Herennia chafes at the accent of authority.

'The law gives thee power to lock me up, Mother, otherwise thou canst not prevent me from that hearing. I know what Pompeius would say, and I have come hither to listen.'

'Thou knowest ! Well, I am informed that Umbritius has already conferred with thee—which makes no need for thee to be insolent—on the object of Pompeius' visit.'

'I knew that object, Mother, before Umbritius talked to me.'

'Then, thou art part Sibyl, and shouldst have been, as I have told thee, a temple virgin, for assuredly what suspicion I had on the matter, I did not confide to thee.'

'Truly, Mother, it sometimes seems that I have received from Demeter, or maybe Athene, a certain gift by which I discern in fitful gleams the thoughts of men, and have a dim perception of things about to happen.'

'Thy gift might have been of service had it warned me to cover the young vines from the hailstorm which has destroyed the promise of vintage,' says Junia sneeringly. 'Well, well, if thou see'st into the purpose of the gods, and if Umbritius interprets his omens rightly, thou shouldst shrink with alarm instead of staring overboldly as thou dost into the face of thy wooer—a gaze which, by Diana, would have been deemed unbecoming in a Roman maiden of the old school.'

Herennia's dark eyes turn from Pompeius, upon whom

they had rested with a curiously impersonal expression, towards her mother's angry countenance. She silences Junia Verecunda with an impetuous gesture.

'Oh, peace, I pray thee, Mother! I mean no disrespect, but thou dost irritate me beyond endurance. I am no Roman maiden of the old school, but a modern woman, born under the most absolute of the Cæsars and the most artistic.'

Junia raises her hands in horror.

'Hear her! Thus she speaks of her father's murderer and the slayer of his mother.'

'Nero was mad,' calmly replies Herennia. 'So was the divine Julius, and so was Nero's great-grandmother Julia. That was not his fault, and he was an artist all the same. It is no matter. I repeat that I am a woman, Mother, with mind and will and the right to choose my own life, and I will not be hindered by old-fashioned ways and Sabine traditions.'

'Thou speakest of mind and will, Herennia,' Umbritius remarks in gentle rebuke, 'but thou sayest naught of conscience and of affection, the qualities most commendable in a woman.'

'Conscience is for the elders and for those who serve the State. As for affection—I have none. That is not my fault, any more than it was Nero's fault not to understand that he was mad. Truly, if there be a heart caged within my body, I know nothing of it, save that it beats when I run too fast or climb to the temple on the hill-top without stopping to take breath.'

She laughs the silvery chime which resembles clashing cymbals, and as she speaks advances to her suitor, taking the initiative after a manner strange in a girl of her years.

'Greeting to thee, Pompeius! Thou hast now some experience of what my mother calls my frowardness. Art thou still of the same mind concerning me?'

'I greet thee as thy slave, sweet Herennia, and my mind is thine.'

'Now, that's a way of talking that pleases me. A different song from the one my mother sings in my ears.'

'I like thy frowardness, my dear, for it is honest. Let there be truth always between thee and me.'

'Agreed. There shall be truth between thee and me; then, even Umbritius, who abhors falseness, shall have no charge against me, whatever may be my sins. Come to the garden, Pompeius. These walls breathe scoldings; they stifle. Let us sit in the temple yonder, and I will reveal to thee—not my heart, for it has naught to say—but my will and my mind.'

She darts a glance of triumphant defiance from her mother to Umbritius, and smiles at the latter—that exceedingly sweet smile which irradiates her cold, discontented face, and makes of her another woman. The philosopher smiles too, and puts his hand upon her shoulder indulgently. He is not without a sense of humour, and Herennia, with all her faults, is very dear to him. Then he draws aside the curtain, and his eyes follow the two as they pass out through the open court, with its running fountain, and into the neglected garden, sweet with the scent of spring flowers and bright with spring sunshine.

Herennia, tall and stately in her girl's robes, leads with her elastic step, Pompeius, his malformation scarcely apparent beneath his ample toga, following close behind her. Junia Verecunda, also watching the pair, cannot repress an exclamation of pride in her daughter's dignity and beauty.

'She would grace the Palatine, Umbritius! How much better than that low-born Flavian brood! A pity Pompeius is not straighter made! But although he may

not be a model for Lysippus, he comes of good stock and has a noble fortune. Thou hast done well with thine advocacy. Pray Juno that no gust of temper prevent the espousals. We will hurry on the contract, and I must seek a suitable pronuba—not so easy to find in these days of divorced women and many husbands. What thinkest thou of Fannia, the daughter of our famous Arria, whom I knew intimately? It shall be a marriage of patricians, celebrated with the sacred rites; and the Flamen Dialis, who has ever been interested in Herennia, will join their hands and break the holy cake. So we will fight thy omens, my Umbritius, and preserve the family traditions and a decent appearance. For, seeing that Pompeius is not Cæsar, it will be difficult for him to repudiate Herennia, however much he may fall out with her moods.’

Again the scene melts and changes. In fourth-dimensional drama there are no terrestrial stage limitations. This old Roman garden, in spite of its unclipped hedges and disorderly flower-beds, has a melancholy charm of its own. Now may be seen the extent of the country house and grounds, which is greater than appears from the entrance; for, after the manner of Roman villas, it is irregular in its proportions, throwing out here a dining-room to catch the winter sun, and there a summer portico, shaded from the heat; and in the garden a disused pavilion, with bedroom above, the freak of some wealthier occupant, and a row of guest-chambers, now never occupied, and a gymnasium, in which no one wields the clubs except Herennia, who practises certain athletic exercises recommended by Hippia, less for the improvement of her figure than as a vent for youth’s feverish energy.

Roses climb over broken trellises, pushing forth young succulent shoots. In one spot a mutilated Flora is girded

and garlanded with great yellow blossoms. Purple irises surround the fountains, which are fed by a stream trickling down from the height, and diverted in its course by the skill of some former-time gardener. Daisies spangle the grass, and there are patches of yellow and blue crocuses. The air is sweet with narcissus flowers and many odorous bulbs, while round the temple dedicated to Ceres bloom beds of anemones and rows of daffodils—that fatal plant with its tufts of blossom which lured the girl goddess into the arms of dark-browed Aidoneus, and dragged her down into the kingdom of the Shades. Near the temple grows a very old olive-tree, riven by lightning, which has put forth fresh shoots. There is a narrow path leading up the hill to a well beneath the olive, from which dwellers in the village draw water. Round the well is a broad border of discoloured marble.

It is such a spot as that where the divine mother sat in sorrow when the yellow-haired daughters of Celeus brought her to their home. Involuntarily this picture rises in Pompeius' mind. Herennia seems to him in her white draperies, as she walks, with her royal face, her inspired eyes, her corn-coloured hair, like one of King Celeus' daughters, or, in truth, as the divine maiden herself, ere the Plains of Enna opened before the deathless horses.

They pass along a short avenue of ilexes, which may have been young when Cincinnatus left his plough to save Rome. The dark tree-boles have gigantic protuberances, and are patched with velvety lichen. Their foliage spreads out dark and dense, and they seem more solemn, yet less sacred, than Demeter's olive, as they now take the curious brassy tinge which falls on ilexes at the sun's lowering. Through their black stems, like pictures set in panels, show glimpses of the rich-peopled Campagna, of glittering Tusculum and green-bosomed Tiber, of the marble-

crowned heights near Præneste, and of the eerie solitudes under the Alban hills.

As they pace beneath the venerable trees Pompeius opens his heart to Herennia, telling her of his love; and she listens, silently at first, bidding him have patience, and that by Demeter's altar she will answer him. He knows not the reason for her whimsical delay, suspects some sacred sentiment, and honours her reticence; not pressing her, but painting in fervid language the joy with which he looks forward to intellectual companionship with her, the happiness he will find in surrounding her with every pleasure and luxury which her fancy may desire, the tender solicitude with which he will anticipate her lightest wish.

Spring birds carol blithely in the branches of the solemn ilexes. He tells her of the starling he has trained to say 'Salve' on the day when, as his bride, she will cross the threshold of his house. She only smiles, gazing far out over the Campagna. Now they have reached the shrine of Ceres. Here is a statue of the goddess placed there by Junia Verecunda's father, who had dedicated the temple in commemoration of an abundant yield of the earth's fruits. Herennia regards the image of the goddess as one may look on the face of a familiar and venerated friend. She calls the attention of Pompeius to its archaic dignity in contrast with the Græco-Roman art of the day.

'Tell me,' she asks, 'if you consider it a genuine antique. I have always hoped it might be so.'

Pompeius looked at the statue critically, giving his opinion that it was of Greek origin.

'But I have not come with thee here to discuss Greek antiques, Herennia,' he says. 'Remember, it is thy will and thy mind which thou hast promised to lay bare to me.'

Herennia turns from contemplation of the goddess, and,

seating herself on the steps of the raised platform beneath the image, looks frankly into his face. She has a musing air.

'Thus it shall be. I like thy candour. Friend Pompeius, is it true that thou hast asked me of my mother in marriage?'

'It is true, Herennia. I have considered long whether I might dare to woo thee, and thou knowest the cause of my diffidence. Doubtless Umbritius has spoken to thee of my feeling of shame for my bodily defects, which seem the more hideous beside thy straight loveliness.'

Herennia's eyes are turned from him as she replies:

'Thou art great of soul, Pompeius, though thy face may be blemished and thy frame puny. Thinkest thou that I do not recognise thy greatness?'

'Then thou dost not shrink from me, my dearest?'

He lays his hand on her wrist, and gently draws himself a little nearer to her. Still she does not meet his ardent gaze.

'I do—not shrink. My mind goes out to thine, and knows it for a mate.'

She speaks slowly, with little pauses, then proceeds impetuously:

'Nay, I would be open in my speech to thee. It is true that my mind—my soul, maybe—greet thee, and that I am thy friend—that I would even be thy wife. But I am two women in one, Pompeius, and thou shouldst understand this thing. One part of me is mind and will, and the other passion, impulse—I know not what—and at times that other self frightens me. It is this part of me which delights in the free glory of Nature, and in the strength of man. It is this part of me which desires—again I know not what, but I know that the desire is strange and sweet, and that it terrifies me by its mastery. Dost thou fear it, Pompeius?'

‘I fear nothing, Herennia, so that thou givest thyself in faith to me, trusting to my love to inform with love thy woman’s nature. For it is the untaught woman-self of thee, my dear, which prompteth thy desire—the heart’s desire of gracious womanhood, most noble and most sweet. I love thee! I love thee, sweetheart, and I would devote my life and all that the eternal gods have bestowed on me to the making of thy happiness.’

‘Thou lovest me, Pompeius! But I do not know love. Explain it to me.’

He kneels at her feet, and presses still nearer. His plain face, scarred and pitted, appears almost transfigured by the light shining through it from his kindled passion. And now she smiles down upon him with no revulsion.

‘There are many kinds of love, my Herennia, yet all issue from the same fount of divinity. We know the love of Achilles for Patroclus, and again for the maiden Briseis. Earth tells of the love of Demeter for her child. There is the sacred love of Antigone, and there is the chaste ecstasy of Luna bending over the sleeping Endymion. Sweeter still is the wedded love of Odysseus and Penelope, and of great Hector for his wife Andromache. In truth, it seems to me, my dear, that with all these loves do I love thee—the love of friend, father, brother, husband. But it is the love of maid for man that I ask of thee, of wife for spouse, of mother for the children which shall be the fruit of my body and of thine. Ah! dare I ask this great thing of thee, Herennia? My dear, my dear! I, who am deformed and ugly, and have no gift to recommend me but my deep, abiding love for thee!’

She is moved. Her voice falters.

‘And if I cannot give thee this love, Pompeius—this greatest love of all?’

‘Then give me the love of a friend, of a sister to an

elder brother, of the wife, still unwedded, to the husband that shall be. I love thee too well, Herennia, to yield thee to another. Let me have the right to pour out my wealth upon thee, to gratify thy wishes, to open to thee the door of that brilliant world thou cravest, to find my joy in seeing thy content.'

'I could almost love thee, Pompeius'—her voice trembles more—'I could almost love thee for thy tenderness, thy generosity, if, indeed, my heart were not cold as Scythian snow—impenetrable as the marble heart of the goddess upon which I lay my hand. I am ignorant of what love is, Pompeius. I never knew my father, and his memory and his wrongs are naught to me save in that they have held me back from the place to which I was born. I have never loved my mother. No kin of mine she seems, so unlike are all our thoughts and ways. I have neither brother nor sister, nor have I friend—for Hippias is no true friend, goading to revolt the fiercer nature of me—save Umbricius and thee. Oh, I am hard and cold, Pompeius! And I am a-hungered for the joy of earth; I claim the birthright dues of womanhood. I am neglected and empty, and I crave that banquet which the gods provide for their favoured ones. There seems to cry within me the voice of some lusty but starveling thing, which wails and complains continually. Wilt thou still that rebellious voice? Wilt thou spread a feast for that famished creature? Wilt thou warm my cold bosom, and make it glow with the warmth in thine? Wilt thou invoke Eros, and bid him pierce me with his sweet darts, and rouse me to love—to love, as I yearn and yet fear to love?'

Her voice takes an awed accent, and the strange, wild look comes into her eyes, which are no longer bent on him, but gaze out through the open doorway of the temple, beyond the beds of daffodils and the twisted olive

and solemn ilex trees—beyond the misty Campagna and the streets of tombs, out into the dread unknown.

For answer, Pompeius presses closer to the girl; his arms enfold her; he utters adoring words. She listens in half-reluctant curiosity; her tall form bends like a lily swaying in a gust of wind, and their lips meet in the kiss of betrothal.

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Other scenes take shape and dissolve into mist—phantasms of realities, ghost representations of that dead past. The two personalities—that of actor and spectator—lately merged into one, are now again separated. The strain of that quick-pulsing emotion is lifted; all is calm. Dorothea views Herennia from the raised benches, and no longer treads the stage. Yet still, mentally, she is within the picture, comprehending its underlying perplexities, reading thoughts and analyzing feelings, though the pictures are now only shadows of living things—animated photographs serving to illustrate the drama, and beheld by Dorothea as connecting links between certain points of crisis at which action and consciousness intensify.

She sees a temple—not that of Ceres, in the grounds of her old home, but a much grander and better-cared-for place, and close to some fashionable mansion, for she feels the pressure of surrounding life and of an almost bewildering excitement.

The temple is oval within; the pillars encircling its central space are of Parian marble; the altar and sacrificial tripod are beautifully ornamented; the draped statue of Juno a magnificent work of art. In recesses and on side-altars are other images, some homelier, protecting deities, no doubt, of this noble house; and there are many votive relics, among them a golden box studded with jewels, which Dorothea knows to be the dedicatory offering of Pompeius' early manhood. She knows, too,

that the great mansion situated in its own grounds, which the temple, though built apart, seems to adjoin, is the family mansion of Saturninus. She has glimpses outside the temple of pillars — crimson-streaked *giallo antico* and Carystian and Numidian marble, twined with rose garlands and myrtle wreaths; of porticos festooned with ivy; of a winged statue of Hermes poised as in air; of cool courts and playing fountains; of luxuriant vegetation and gorgeous colour and much magnificence. Soldiers are massed about in groups, lining the steps of the temple. She recognises a cohort of Prætorians from their glittering helmets and the flash of their gold embossed breastplates; but the soldiers on the temple steps, Prætorians also, have a distinguishing mark. They are fair, splendid men, belonging to the legion from Gallia Narbonensis, where Pompeius Saturninus once held a public office. From the presence of the Prætorians, Dorothea is aware that Cæsar Vespasian or one of his sons will honour the ceremony.

It is a fine, fashionable gathering. Men in senatorial togas and women in superb dresses descend from their litters and enter the sacred building. There are great officers of state in their robes, and there are ambassadors and envoys in the costumes of their respective countries, giving the whole pageant an effect of courts and diplomacy.

A blast of trumpets sounds; the beautiful women preen themselves, the finely-clad men stand at attention. Yes, this is the Emperor — that stout-limbed, grotesque-featured, farmer-like person, preceded by lictors, wearing the imperial robes and the insignia of his pontificate, dignities which appear to irk him severely. Otherwise he is contented enough, for he likes the fun of weddings, and shy brides have reason to dread his rustic pleasantries. Now his face looks more comically strained than usual

from the jocose humour which for the moment, in deference to the presence of the Flamen and the dignity of the occasion, he endeavours to repress. He smiles graciously on Junia Verecunda, who gives him a salutation worthy of court manners in the stricter days of Nero. Junia's face is less harassed and peevish, though it is full of haughty egotism.

She is dressed with sober richness. For the first time since the disgrace of her husband she takes her place in Roman society, and receives with resentful dignity the overtures of those fair-weather acquaintances who, having deserted her in her affliction, now that her daughter is making a great marriage, and that a portion of her confiscated property has been restored, throng amiably around her. She cannot keep her sharp tongue silent, and Umbritius gently rebukes her.

'It is the way of Rome. Despise it, but contain your scorn. In quiet Gabii you may flee these hypocrisies. Rome provides no place for poverty or simple virtue. Reflect that to be mother-in-law to the descendant of Consuls is your passport to the Palatine.'

Pompeius, his toga of state concealing the crooked shoulders, awaits his bride. The young son of his first wife—a delicate boy not yet in manly garb, and with the golden bulla round his neck—attracts no little notice. It has always been supposed that the child would die, and that Pompeius, not disposed to matrimony, would leave his money among his friends. Now, as Junia Verecunda has satirically observed, there will be less motive for rising early to attend his levee. Pompeius scents the raillery of that Palatine set which he does not love. He would rather have had a quiet wedding, but Junia Verecunda has insisted upon a religious ceremony with all the rites, demanding the presence of the Pontiff and of the Flamens. Pompeius feels himself an object of

jealous ridicule. The Emperor banters him broadly; the exquisites smile and whisper, and regard him with envious contempt. Hippias has extolled the beauty of the bride, and is furious with her husband Veiento because at the signing of the contract he has forced himself upon the party, and it has been repeated to her that this profligate spouse of hers boasted on the occasion that not long would Pompeius' young wife remain virtuous. Fabricius Veiento heads the dissipated circle of which young Domitian Cæsar is the centre. Hippias pretends to rival him in her gallantries, and her flirtation with a famous gladiator is the talk of Rome. But for all that, she is jealous, and postures as the injured matron, though her gold-threaded robe, woven on Greek looms, is of so light a texture as to shock the old-fashioned taste of the noble Fannia, of the fat but most decorous Hispulla, and of the austere mother of young Pliny.

By the altar the Flamen Dialis waits—a majestic figure, whose piercing eyes, like those of some sorrowful god, surveys the frivolous crowd, mourning the corruption which he is powerless to stem. They rest sadly upon Herennia as she enters the sacred building; for now the trumpets blare once more. Pompeius peers eagerly for the sight of Herennia's litter and the accompanying Fannia, who has been chosen to introduce the girl-bride to the estate of matrimony.

The bride steps from her litter, pale, proud, composed. She has put aside her girlish tunic, and her robe falls in straight stripes to her yellow-shod feet, being bound round the waist with the marriage girdle. Her hair is parted into six plaits, and round her slim form floats the mystic flame-coloured veil. Her procession advances between the assembled witnesses. The dissolute-looking Roman men stare at her with evil eyes, and Fabricius Veiento can scarce contain his admiration. Junia Verecunda's breast heaves

with satisfaction as the Emperor himself makes way and salutes Herennia. For all that he is a low-born Flavian, nevertheless is he Cæsar.

Pompeius and Herennia stand side by side, the Flamen joins their hands, the sacred cake is given to each, the marriage formula is pronounced, 'Where thou art Caius, I am Caia.' The two seat themselves on the symbolic fleece, white as snow, and bordered with a fringe of gold and pearls. The sacrifice is made; the Flamen pronounces the blessing.

Then Pompeius, still holding Herennia's hands, draws her down to him as they stand together and kisses her brow. There is another blare of trumpets, and the man and woman are made indissolubly one.

Mists again, and now it is evening. Music sounds—the strains of the nuptial hymn. A gay procession passes, of men and women, garlanded and merry. The musicians make revel with flute and pipe, torch-bearers come before and after. Alas! it is noted as an evil omen that the torches flicker and burn pale! Guests older and graver surround the litter of the bride. At their head the virtuous Fannia, and on the other side of the litter Junia Verecunda. In the procession are borne the girl-bride's dolls and playthings, and the small properties of her childhood. It wends along the streets below the palace of Saturninus.

A full moon shines over Rome. Clearly visible is the enormous mass of the Flavian theatre now building, and opposite, the Palatine gleams with lights, while further to the left rises the stern citadel of the Capitol and the gilt dome of the temple of Jupiter. Moonlight silvers the statues and columns on the rise, the colossus of Nero, and the flying chariots of the Sun. And now the great gates of Saturninus' palace stand open. Moving torches blaze;

hundreds of slaves throng the area and vestibule. The night air is heavy with the perfume of fading roses which twine the columns.

Now the marriage hymn swells louder, and the merriment of the guests becomes more boisterous, while the eight Liburnians in their splendid livery come to a halt. She has her wish—fortunate Herennia! Not in Rome will there be an equipage to equal hers, unless it be one issuing from the imperial precincts. The bride is lifted from her litter, and amid laughter and jest borne over her husband's threshold. She is bidden to streak the marble with wolf's fat ready prepared for the purpose, and the traditionary flax is handed her to bind upon the lintel. Junia Verecunda will have no Sabine custom forgotten or violated.

And now she is in the vast atrium, almost dazzled by its magnificence. The wreathed statues have an air of ghostly merriment, and the waxen images of the ancestors, looking almost human as the lights shine upon them, confront her with living eyes. In all this profusion of gold and silver, gorgeous marbles, rich hangings and downy carpets—the wealth for which she has sold herself—those life-like Roman faces seem to frown upon her and arraign her for treachery. These ancestors of Pompeius Saturninus are her judges. They will be the forefathers of her children. It is not strange, after Vespasian's ribald witticisms, that this thought should come into the mind of the bride. This is her mission—to give children to the Roman State and to Pompeius. Will they be deformed like him?

Involuntarily she shudders as Fannia, in virtue of her office, leads her to the matron's throne, which, covered with tapestry of gold and purple, awaits her occupancy. Pompeius whispers tender words in her ear, bidding her not to shrink too visibly; that these old Roman customs

must be honoured ; that soon they will be alone, and that henceforth he is her worshipping slave.

Thus Herennia enters into her kingdom.

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Years pass. The scenes flit with them—a splendid phantasmagoric show, in which the life of Rome unfolds itself ; the life of high society, where intellect, ambition, martial courage go hand-in-hand with unbridled sensuality, crime and cruelty, the social life in which material prosperity is at its height, and when corruption has not wholly sapped the nation's strength, and cankered to its roots the most magnificent civilization humanity has produced.

Oh, glorious city, in all the glitter of its golden domes, its many-coloured marbles, its stupendous works of art, its groves and porticos and superb idleness, its wonderful and motley population, so that it is the focus of the whole known world, and from its golden Mile-stone distance is measured to the limits of explored earth ! No wonder that Dorothea Queste, gazing out of the window of her Chelsea studio, used to be haunted by visions of Tiber, mist-wreathed at morn and eve, rolling down amid splendour and squalor, and through the trees and meadows of which Virgil tells, to meet that old-fabled sea of gods and heroes. No wonder that the traditions of a mighty past kindle strange memories and stir the Celtic blood of this nineteenth-century Irishwoman, and that her lower self yearns dumbly for the old pomp and pride, the unparalleled luxury, the power of life and death over three hundred slaves, the political intrigues and struggles, the empire men's admiration bestowed, which were to her as daily bread in the splendid days.

Still from the raised benches, reproducing soullessly the moods of her former self, Dorothea watches Herennia during the years immediately following her marriage with

Pompeius. At first, the life is comparatively placid. In the Cœlian palace scene follows scene, illustrating the daily doings of a wealthy Roman lady, whose household is conducted lavishly, autocratically, at times, on the part of the mistress, with freakish humour, yet always with a certain old-world dignity. Herennia moves in apartments of which words baldly convey the magnificence. Here is a sleeping-chamber, where the bed is ivory, inlaid with gold, the coverings rare embroidery, and the carpets and hangings most costly products of Babylonian looms; the hanging-lamps and candelabra are of silver, marvels of artistic workmanship; the silver mirrors are set in gold and gems, the walls are incrustated with tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl; beautiful statues stand in niches; the doorways are veiled with curtains of wonderful feather-work; hundreds of costly trifles—jewel-caskets, essence-bottles, unguent-boxes—lie about, made of precious metal, sardonyx and agate. Close by, stretch a suite of bath-rooms, in one a great marble bath, the border of which, in jade, represents turf enamelled with blossoms of pearls, while the water gushes from the mouth of a dolphin, on whose back lovely Thetis reclines—the work of Rome's most celebrated sculptor. This bath is as the sanctuary of a goddess. The pillars of Parian marble are twined with flowers; every morning fresh petals of roses, of violets, of verbena, are spread on the pavement. The water in the bath is now of milky hue, now of crystal clearness. It is the fancy of Herennia to have different perfumes for special days.

Dorothea watches her in her study, where are reading-couches and chairs of ivory and gold, and tables of spotted citrus wood set on pedestals which are upheld by heads and claws of griffins and suchlike monsters. Busts of Greek poets stand on one row of bookcases, those of learned Romans on another. All round are volumes in rare bindings.

Sometimes a secretary writes at Herennia's dictation, sometimes she is conversing with her procurator, sometimes a reader or reciter whiles away a dull hour; more often the reader is Pompeius himself; and though at first Herennia's interest in her studies is evident, later, she looks bored and impatient, and would fain have had some more exciting occupation.

Now she is at her toilette, which appears to occupy much of her time. Beautiful Syrian and Greek girls surround her. One is coiling the high erection of curls common to the period; another powders the light tresses, giving them a golden sheen; another accentuates an eyebrow or adds a touch of carmine, while one ties the thongs of embroidered sandals, and the mistress of the wardrobe adjusts the folds of her palla.

Again, Herennia is receiving at her own morning levee, while Pompeius in the more public rooms exchanges courtesies with a crowd of clients and toga'd visitors. Or she is in the family chapel where Pompeius, after the manner of highly respected Romans, offers the morning incense to his domestic deities. Now they are together at the family meal, at which young Annæus, Pompeius' son by his first wife, is present. Herennia is kind to the delicate boy, who adores his stepmother—kind because he adores her—and she neglects her own infant because she dislikes babies, and this one is puling and plain, and resembles her husband. Far more interested does she appear in the Moorish dwarf who accompanies her everywhere, and in her pet ichneumon and her talking magpie.

Now she is being carried in a litter, a large retinue accompanying her. Tall, powerful men in bright scarlet bear her on their shoulders above the crowd, while other men go before crying, 'Way for Herennia, wife of the noble Pompeius Saturninus!'

The litter halts on the marble steps of a colonnaded building, waiting for a procession to pass down from the great temple on the Capitoline Hill. Dorothea recognises the procession as one that she has seen in her studio visions.

This glittering space must be the Forum. Here are the slender Greek shafts and sculptured pediments of the temple below the Citadel. Yonder the marble pile of the Cæsars rears itself, and below it are the close walls of the Vestals' dwelling. The sacred horses of Castor and Pollux seem living but for their whiteness. Higher, perched aloft, and, as it were, prancing in air, are colossal steeds in marble, harnessed to a chariot blazing with gold. The multitude of colossii and statues is bewildering. The motley throng threading pillars and porticos and congregating below the rostra seems dominated by the crowd of marble figures also peopling this comparatively small space which is the centre of Roman activity. The Capitol and its gloomy prisons frown grimly in contrast with Jupiter's glorious new temple, of which the gilded cupola set on eagles is as a gigantic sun at its setting. All the hundred marble steps leading from the Forum to the temple are gradients made of human faces and forms. The air is rent with shouts as the procession winds slowly down the incline.

Chanting acolytes swing censers, filling the atmosphere with Arabian perfumes. Young boys and girls from the temple scatter flowers—cherry-blossoms and leaves of box. Priests follow, bearing standards and holy emblems, and the blood and ashes of the sacrifice. Then the Flamen Dialis, stately as a god, walks alone, a branch of roses in one hand, in the other an ivory rod tipped with some shining substance and twined with golden serpents. He is robed in pure white but for his purple stole and the purple band on his mitre. The people

press near, endeavouring to kiss his hands. Then comes a great throng clad in white; afterwards soldiers with prisoners—fair, wild men whose eyes are dazed with the sights around them, and some women and girls, among whom is one, almost a child, and who arrests Dorothea's attention and again produces that effect of dual personality, for she realizes intuitively that this child is one of those causes which have made her life of to-day. The girl wears fetters on her wrists—a captive, no doubt, from some Northern tribe; she has a lovely face and pleading blue eyes full of fear and wonderment. Behind the captives follow horsemen and warriors. Then the two Consuls in robes of state and the appanage of their office. The Chief Vestal Cornelia and her sister priestesses have also a place, preceded by their lictors. The most noticeable figure in the procession is the Emperor.

Domitian is young, well-featured, and not unprepossessing, though his expression is arrogant. He flushes and pales with excitement at the plaudits of the mob. On his forehead is a crown of myrtle and bay. Before and behind come his lictors, his sceptre-bearer and attendants. An immense train of patricians presses close around him. The voice of the multitude resounds; there is the simultaneous clash of arms and of musical instruments; the people raise their arms, and kiss the closed thumb and forefinger towards the sacred emblems.

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The Forum has vanished. Herennia is in a great banqueting-room—a banqueting-room in her own house. This is not one of the simple literary gatherings Pompeius delights in; there is more state, more ceremony. The sideboards are covered with magnificent plate—silver cups by Mys and Mentor; a most beautifully chased drinking-horn—an ancient work of art brought from Greece; gold goblets studded with precious stones; a priceless myrrhine

bowl. There are lamps from Egina, great vases of Corinthian brass, gold and silver platters, the rarest drinking vessels, their stems encircled with rings. The guests are in keeping. Ladies in grand dresses, dignified matrons for the most part—for Pompeius and his wife do not affect the giddy Palatine set; men in gay tunics with bare arms smooth as ivory, clasped near the elbow with gold bands. Some have the appearance of generals returned from a campaign; they are bronzed and bearded, and less effeminate than the loungers in the Baths and Porticos. The talk is animated; they are discussing the Germans, and their strange ways, and their curious veneration of certain gifted women, and mention is made of a hand-maid and friend of the Virgin Queen Velea, who has been carried to Rome as a captive. While the courses are brought in, and in the intervals, singers and musicians entertain the guests. An actor recites from Sophocles, which Herennia feels to be a mistake, for many of the veterans do not understand Greek. Some Asiatic boys play on a peculiar kind of flute. Now a girl appears, and takes her place among the musicians. She looks frightened, and is very pale; but she is extremely beautiful, with fair hair and eyes blue and deep as the sea in a calm. Her dress is strange, but very graceful; strings of amber, the colour of Herennia's hair—her own is pale gold—hang from her neck. She, too, plays on a foreign instrument. One of the generals encourages her with some friendly words. It is the young maiden of the procession, for, struck with pity, Pompeius has purchased her and presented her to his wife. The girl sings one of the wild songs of her native land; the guests applaud, but she weeps. Herennia bids them bring her nearer, and soothes her with kind words, giving her sweetmeats. But the girl gazes at her new mistress with mournful prophetic eyes and weeps on, and now, lifting her arms in

a passionate gesture, seems to be invoking her country's gods that some terrible doom may be averted from her. The old general, who knows her language, interprets the words to Herennia.

'Have patience with her, Domina. She is alarmed at the splendour here, at the crowd in the streets, and the great buildings. She asks to be delivered from unknown temples and palaces, and to be set loose in woods, to which she has been accustomed. "Are there no spreading oaks and silent groves in Rome?" she cries. Astatha has dwelt all her life in the Hercynian forest; she is a wild fawn caged.'

'Let her be comforted,' says Pompeius. 'It is my purpose, if Herennia wills, to send her to our Tuscan estate till she recovers strength, and till we go thither for our summer sojourn. Though there are no giant trees and vast solitudes beneath the Apennines, such as my friend Pliny has described in the forests of the Treverians, she will find shady groves and murmurous woods where she may almost imagine herself back in her old home.'

The banqueting-hall fades like the pictures before it. Summer scenes follow. These have for background the various villas which Pompeius owns; most often that one beneath the Apennines, which is his favourite resort, and where he enacts the part of beneficent patron, lord of a large property, statesman at leisure, and man of letters. Here he collects congenial literary friends—the old poet Silius Italicus, with whom he reads and recites Virgil; Valerius Flaccus, whom Herennia finds prosy; while the morose Juvenal, who attracts her, and whose satires none dare quote in Rome, may here be heard fearlessly reciting his works beneath the shade of the plane-trees on the lawn to the accompaniment of playing fountains. Martial, too, is sympathetic and amusing till need makes him a

sycophant; and there is Tacitus, courteous, reserved, aristocratic in mien, yet firing her adventurous spirit by the wild tales of Northern seas that he tells so well, and which he has heard from his father-in-law Agricola, and stirring the mysticism in her by his stories of Veleda, the priestess-queen who is now at war with Rome—Veleda of whom Astatha also has told her. Besides these there are Codrus and Bassus, and many a poor poet and rhetorician who discourse on subtleties, and are grateful to Pompeius for the winter toga which at the Saturnalia he invariably sends them, and for the summer outing he provides free of expense; and there are men of political note and integrity at Rome, thrown in the shade by the favourites of the young Cæsar, to whom Pompeius' house is a rallying-point.

Living again this old life, grasping its many threads as the dream-scenes chase each other upon a moving background, and understanding with her fourth-dimensional faculties all that is not actually revealed, Dorothea finds it interesting to observe how Herennia is the inspiring life of this literary circle, how her keen wit has been sharpened, her longing for culture gratified, and how her doting husband admires her natural talent, and cultivates and prunes it by his superior knowledge, so that her letters are the talk of a chosen few to whom he shows them, and her reputation almost equals that of another literary woman of the day—the famous and, to Herennia, over-conjugal Sulpicia. For the intimates of Pompeius are not of the pleasure-loving crowd which throngs the Palatine under the new Emperor. More and more since his marriage has Saturninus withdrawn himself from fashionable life; and Herennia, still restless, still dissatisfied, and still craving for the banquet of gods and men, resents the withdrawal, and rebels against her unemotional existence.

She craves an absorbing interest, a mental and moral stimulant, and she translates the craving into one word—Love. She desires to know what love means, this supreme experience of womanhood. The two selves of her of which in the days of her wooing she spoke to Pompeius are at one in this delicious desire. It is not in its physical shape only that she craves for love—her young senses thrill at the thought of dual oneness; but it is for the spiritual as well that she longs—the perfect combination of body and soul. It is the desire of Psyche, and till she has made the dream which haunts her a reality, never can Herennia be content. At times the passion to know this dream-reality possesses her to so great an extent that there are mad moments in which she would almost barter her position for the sake of some unlawful excitement—mad moments in which she dares to envy Messalina for the courage which led her, disguised in her yellow wig, from the Emperor's palace to the Suburra.

In one of these wild impulses she has admitted Fabricius Veiento to the intimacy of her private apartments, has allowed herself to be interested in his polished sensualism, has been on the point of receiving him as a lover for the mere sake of a sensation. But the revulsion comes in time. She does not love him; his fascination is unholy; there are moods in which she could murder him for having seen her at her lowest. And if she cannot love Veiento—exquisite, subtle, talented, alluring even in his badness—how much less can she love others of those smooth-armed, unguent-reeking Romans! Rather would she follow Hippia's example, and fling herself into the arms of a gladiator. But the athletes and the champion fencers and the charioteers whom she meets at Hippia's house, and in the porticos and lounges of the Campus Martius, where with other idle ladies she whiles away a sunny hour or so of the mornings, revolt her as much as the debauched

patricians, and bore her more than the poor poets whom her husband provides with dinners, and the Stoics and Cynics and learned philosophers with whom he delights in discussing the arguments for and against immortality.

Yet outwardly Herennia has the reputation of austere virtue. Except, perhaps, for Veiento's boasts among his boon companions, her name is coupled with that of no man but her husband. She takes a certain pride in being talked of as the proudest and coldest of beautiful women. There is a period at which she consults the Flamen Dialis in regard to occult studies and religious exercises, and is then deeply annoyed because the Flamen mournfully informs her that her nature is not yet ready for the pursuit of higher knowledge. She has a phase common to the gay ladies of Rome, the fancy for dabbling in supernatural matters; and more than once Dorothea sees her in converse with a priest of Serapis, or with one of the Chaldaean Astrologers who swarm in the Imperial city. Then there is a sudden revulsion. She wishes to be a woman of fashion, and this is rendered the more easy by the re-appointment of Pompeius to his old office in Gallia Narbonensis, whither she refuses to accompany him on plea of poor health, and on the advice of Symmachus the physician. In vain Umbritius endeavours to persuade her, citing the example of Agrippina the elder, and of Epponina and Arria; but Herennia silences him by saying that it is Pompeius' wish she should remain in Rome.

She knows that Fabricius Veiento, who is in high favour with the young Emperor, has instigated her husband's appointment. She knows, too, though Hippias introduces her to the Palatine gaities, and is ostensibly her friend, that the wife of Veiento is jealous of her husband's devotion to that friend, and desires her moral downfall; for it is not to Hippias's satisfaction that Herennia's virtue should inflame Veiento's passion, and secure for her rival a respect

that would be lost were she to sink to the level of other Roman ladies.

The scenes fly fast; the old faces no longer surround her. Umbritius is gone. The Emperor has banished philosophers, and the vices of Rome have stricken with horror the ascetic and noble-minded soothsayer, who has sought retirement in the shades of Cumæ. Dorothea sees him bidding Herennia farewell, giving her his last exhortation to quit the fashionable gaieties which are destroying her soul, warning her of a peril in store—that which he has foreseen from the beginning, foreordained by fate, and which he is powerless to avert. But Herennia laughs, and gives no heed.

It is a shifting display of brilliant pictures—banquets where shameless revelry courts the dawn; visits in Hippias's company to gladiatorial shows and races in the Great Circus, with wild backing of charioteers and jockeys, dark suggestions of unnameable profligacy, crime and horror in the background, and through all, a strange sense of mingled fascination and terror. When she tells herself that this is life, that this is the banquet of the lower gods, loathing possesses her. Life it may be, the pastime of the lower gods it may be, but it is not the higher joy. It has naught of the transcendent sweetness of love; and for love, and love alone, she yearns.

Her own puling child is dead. She has neglected it in its last illness, and in the arms of Fannia it breathed its final breath. Such noble matrons as Fannia, the gentle Calpurnia, and the delightful Corellia, shun her society. Pompeius is in Gallia Narbonensis.

Annæus, the son of his first wife, becomes a cause of trouble. The youth has just assumed the toga of manhood, and has been instructed by Veiento and others in the vices of Rome. Dorothea beholds him paying court

to the captive slave Astatha. The girl shrinks from him, but he persists. There is a scene in which Herennia remonstrates with her stepson, and he upbraids her—her, Herennia, whom he has loved and honoured—with having destroyed his belief in virtue, since he has seen her sink so far below the noble standard of womanhood. She might have redeemed him; instead, she has been his bane and corrupter. Herennia is horrified by his daring profligacy. She sends Astatha away, not grieved to part with her slave-companion, for some curious instinct has always made her dislike and dread the Treverian captive.

Again there is a quiet gathering in the palace on the Cœlian, for Pompeius has returned for a short time from Gaul. He looks preoccupied and sad. Further and further have husband and wife drifted apart, and in this hard, frivolous woman he scarcely recognises the girl whom he loved and wooed. And Herennia—still in her heart she recognises him as her mind's mate, the companion of her truer and better self. She is haunted by regrets for the married happiness she has wilfully cast away; still is she fearful of that caged creature within, grown more lusty with the years, whose hungry clamouring Pompeius' gentle tenderness has never stilled. She is fully conscious of her own wild impulses, of her baser craving for love and liberty. And so she dares not meet her husband's mournful gaze, and, knowing her unworthiness, seems cold and repellent because of the remorse which smites her, and shrinks in shame from his anxious inquiries and timid caresses.

Dorothea sees Pompeius standing by the balustrade of the fishpond in the gardens of his palace. Other guests loiter among the colonnades. It is the hour preceding supper, and they have not yet put aside their togas. Pompeius is in earnest converse with a kindly-faced and

courteous-mannered gentleman, and Herennia, strolling towards them, knows this man for Plinius Secundus, the nephew of the great naturalist who has been one of her husband's closest friends. Pliny is counselling Pompeius on the subject of Annæus. Herennia draws near. Pompeius has complained of the pedagogue to whom he entrusted his son. Secundus, as they call him, advises the elder man to secure a different sort of tutor—one of social endowments and intellectual superiority—who will wean the boy from his bad companions, and lead him to higher pursuits by the force of interest and example; a man of recognised worth, who will accompany the young Annæus to the Forums when the pleadings are going on, and to such intellectual gatherings as the recitations of Statius, or the more refined performances at the Odeum and the lecture halls; a man of culture, who is yet an accomplished sportsman, able to participate in the youth's liking for the shows and contests in the Campus Martius, for, strangely enough, the weakling boy has a passion for all athletic exercises; a man, in short, who will model Annæus upon the nobler type of Roman patrician.

They discuss names. Quintilian is too old and his school too important. Euphrates too wealthy now that he has married the daughter of a noble house. The philosophers Artemidorus and Nicetes not attainable, nor calculated to influence the boy's peculiar character. It must be a man of the world, a man of social qualifications, of unimpeachable character, and gifted in the matter of manly exercises, as well as a man of parts. Plinius bethinks him of the person of all others best qualified for the post. Herennia is thrilled by a wild, sweet expectancy. She seems to imagine that to her this man will be fateful.

His name is Demetrius Othânes, an Armenian educated in Greece. It is whispered that he is the son of the great

Corbulo by Demetria, an accomplished Greek slave—that he is the fruit of an Asiatic amour. From Corbulo he derives his physical prowess, and his proficiency in manly exercises from his mother Demetria—afterwards a noted courtesan—as also, from his Achæan education, a certain subtle charm, his power as an elocutionist, and all his fine poetic qualities. Plinius Secundus relates that not many years before Othanes had come to Rome, and, having attracted the notice of the elder Pliny, had assisted him as secretary and in various scientific labours till the tragic death of Pliny had taken place in the Vesuvian eruption, when it was found that the naturalist had left Demetrius a small competence. In this manner Othanes had worked himself into the more literary society of Rome, though it has happened, through Pompeius’ absence, that he is a stranger at the palace on the Cœlian.

It is proposed that he shall be sent for to join the supper-party, and Plinius writes the invitation on a tablet which a slave is commissioned to take. Now, more guests arrive, and the company goes into the banqueting-room. The men put aside their togas, appearing in tunics of blue and purple and scarlet. Slaves bring silver ewers with embroidered napkins and rose chaplets. There are only two ladies besides Herennia—the portly Hispulla, aunt to Pliny’s wife, and a certain young Attia Variola, godchild of Pompeius. They are good talkers, the men, though Annæus strikes an inharmonious note in starting a discussion on the chances of the green at the forthcoming games, and in extolling the buffoonery of Latinus the player. Pliny’s exquisite tact draws the conversation into wider channels. He is polished, urbane, a trifle pedantic, but never failing in kindly sympathy. He encourages Cornelius Tacitus to question Pompeius on Gallic customs, while the host, in his turn, asks for news

of Tacitus' father-in-law, Agricola. Then Vibius Crispus, a quaint old man who reminds Herennia somewhat of the Emperor Vespasian, tells some amusing stories of Domitian at Albanum. The proceedings against the Vestals have roused the sacred college, and are spoken of more seriously as foreboding ill to the Empire, and as drawing down the wrath of the gods, though some maintain that since Nero corrupted the convent it has good need of being purged.

'Give me a penny, my grave hostess,' says Pliny, 'and I, too, will tell a story.'

Herennia has been sitting silent and abstracted, wondering when Othanes will come. Now she rouses herself with the mechanical grace of a woman of society caught off duty. Graciously smiling on Pliny, she begs him to proceed.

'My story comes from an unimpeachable source,' begins Pliny. 'You know the philosopher Athenodorus? Well, it is he who is the hero of my tale, and its subject is a certain haunted house in Athens, where he exorcised a ghost, which had caused the house to remain uninhabited by living beings for several years.'

Pliny is just at the end of his narrative, and is replying in his urbane manner to the various comments it calls forth—the hysterical questioning as to his belief in ghosts of the pretty young Attia, and the sceptical objections of one or two of the young wits at table—when a slight stir among the slaves at the entrance door interrupts the flow of conversation, and the nomenclator ushers in a new guest. He is a tall, handsome man, with singularly fine eyes, dressed in the Greek cloak, and Pliny at once presents him as Demetrius Othanes. A place is made for him beside Herennia, and in the first glance he gives her, the first word of conventional thanks which he utters, Herennia knows

that her heart's desire has been granted. At last, at last she has met the man whom she can love! Othànes shows no embarrassment, though naturally of inferior rank to his entertainers and fellow-guests; and, to put him still more at ease, Pliny changes the subject of his story to an anecdote illustrating his uncle's extraordinary industry, so that even at the chase his secretary had to be in close attendance, a fact which he calls upon Demetrius to confirm. Othànes joins in the general talk, which now, as lyrists come in, drops and breaks; and then Herennia, under cover of the music, asks some questions about Greece—a country she has never seen, but which she ardently desires to visit.

His voice enthral's her; she listens as though in a dream. Each accent seems a caress. The secret of this man's strange fascination she cannot tell; she only knows that it is a reality, which must henceforth colour her existence.

Time passes. The pictures on the shadow-sheet seem those of an enchanted land. Now, soft moonlight, in which two lovers embrace; now, afternoon in a rose-grown pavilion, where two hearts reveal to each other their secret longing; now, the dreamy, voluptuous hours of evening, in which the bliss of love requited seems a stolen taste of Paradise. The old story reads the same, no matter in what age and what dress. 'Love while ye may.' Thus to Herennia's ears sounds the song of the nightingale and the cooing of the May birds; thus murmurs the plashing fountain; thus breathes the wind as it stirs the odorous rose-petals. The world is all love. Girlhood has come back. This is the unknown ecstasy for which she has always yearned. What matter that the din of Rome blares without? What matter that lust and iniquity rage? Of what account that a

tyrant is sending brave men to their doom, or that women play the wanton in high places? What matter that the sun sinking over the Eternal City seems to blush in shame, and that the Flamen's god-like eyes are dimmed with sorrow? Love remains, and though the husband be betrayed, who heeds? It is for love. The fatal glamour hangs over Herennia. Othanes is her world. Nothing exists but love.

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As certain bodiless dead sate their earth longings in the sensuous enjoyments of the living, so now does Dorothea, blending her personality with that of her Roman prototype, breathe once more the intoxication of Sarel's caresses in the kisses which Othanes presses upon the lips of Herennia. Every pulse in her beats to the measure of that Roman woman's heart-throbs. She thrills anew as her lover's arms enfold her. It is the same feverish exultation; the same momentary revulsion, to be succeeded by fiercer abandonment, which counts all as nothing in exchange for one brief minute of ecstasy.

They are together in her private room, one looking upon the courtyard. The velarium is drawn in protection against the noonday heat, and a glow of rosy purple falls upon the water in the basin and on the marble limbs of the nymph bending to drink.

Can it be Herennia, this woman transformed?—no longer discontented and hard, but tender, soft, with bosom palpitating, one jewelled hand playing with Othanes' dark curls, as he half reclines on a low stool at her feet, idly fingering the Grecian lyre, which she loves. Suddenly he flings the lyre away, and his arms steal round her form. She bends closer. In broken accents low murmurs of endearment are interchanged. Their lips meet, and then only their hearts speak. Life stands

still; it is the ambrosia of the gods which they sip. Then from the court without comes a sound which startles the pair, and they move apart, and both gaze guiltily through the vine-framed archway of the peristyle into the green maze of the garden beyond.

The sound is strange, and to Othànes unfamiliar—a song of another land, full of pathos and beauty, sent forth by a girl's voice of singular power and of vibrant sweetness.

'It is Astatha,' exclaims Herennia, recalled to herself. She speaks angrily. 'The child has been over-indulged by Pompeius. She forgets that she is a slave, and has no right to sing within my hearing unless commanded. I will forbid her the garden and this court.'

'Nay,' says Othànes. 'The voice is sweet and wild, and sad as the note of Halcyon mourning her mate.'

'She mourns yet for the Hercynian forest and for her lost kindred,' answers Herennia impatiently. 'Thou knowest that she was taken prisoner from the Treverians, and Pompeius bought her as a slave.'

'Divinity, I understand the language of women's hearts. She mourns not for her kindred, but as thou, my dear, didst mourn unknowing for the god Eros, who, till I taught thee love, had visited thee only in dreams.'

'Thou sayest true,' murmurs Herennia. 'Thou art Eros. Thou art my god, my life.'

The Treverian maid sings on; and Othànes, listening enraptured, does not respond to Herennia's passionate avowal. His eyes are fixed upon the archway where, within the circle of purple-red light, Astatha stands.

'By the cross of Christos, she is fair!' he mutters. 'There is a strange magic in her voice.'

It is the same chamber, and again Othànes is with Herennia. Dorothea knows that months have gone by.

The vine is yellowing; the roses have a wintry perfume, which has lost the headiness of spring scent. The glory and fervour of summer are over, and on the faces of Othanes and Herennia there may be seen a change. Rapture is no longer written in his eyes; he has ceased to be the adoring lover, and bitterness and jealous anger have set their stamp upon the woman's features.

He sits on the same stool beside her couch, but not so near as before. The lyre lies unheeded. There has been upbraiding on her part, sullen silence on his. Then she seeks to win him back, stooping towards him and twining her arms about his neck.

'Embrace me, my divinity, my love! Forget my harshness. It is caused only by thy neglect and the fear which maddens me, that thou lovest another. Embrace me, then. Chase away my fears. Be as thou wast when first we loved, and so I may know that thou art faithful.'

But his kiss is cold and mechanical; his reassurances are only the echo of her own doubts. She flings him from her, reproaching him anew. He rises, answering wearily:

'Thou art unreasonable. Love cannot always be at fever heat, and anger whets not the appetite for caresses. Moreover, this window gives view from the garden where Annæus loiters; and thou forgettest that Astatha comes sometimes to gather violets from round the fountain.'

The name of Astatha turns Herennia hard as iron.

'Dost thou forget that I forbade her this portion of the house? Astatha will gather no more violets from round the fountain.'

'Hast thou, then, banished her from thy presence?'

'What is that to thee? Astatha is a slave, and her place is in the slaves' quarter.'

'Thou knowest that she is in danger from Annæus,

and that removed from thy protection he will molest her.'

'What affair is that of thine?' she cries. 'And if he do molest her! I repeat, Astatha is a slave to serve the pleasure of her masters.'

'Not the pleasure of Annæus. Thou art her mistress, and thou hast a kind heart, Herennia, for all thy capricious humours. It is thy duty to guard this poor child from the wilds, who is a chief's daughter and the kinswoman of Queen Veleda.'

'Is it Astatha who has informed thee so well of her parentage? I have observed thee more than once of late. And thou pratest to me of my duty—thou! Herennia's voice trembles with wrath and emotion. 'Thou darest to instruct me! I, Herennia, who am the daughter of a Consul and whose worst weakness is that I have stooped to love thee—the base-born son of Demetria and Corbulo!'

Othànes flushes to the roots of his hair. With a great effort he restrains himself, and answers coldly:

'If that be thy weakness, it should be one easily overcome; and at least thou dost not own me as thy slave that I should submit to these insults. Domina, let us resume our just positions. I crave thy pardon for having forgotten that I am nothing to thee but the pedagogue of thy husband's son.'

Herennia gazes at him with eyes that seem as though they would probe his soul. Her bosom heaves under the gasping breath she draws. Nevertheless her reply is calm.

'It is thy wish, then, Othànes, that our summer dream be forgotten?'

'Thou sayest truly, Domina. It has been a dream—a dream mad and poison-sweet as the dreams engendered by Eastern drugs—a dream full of fleeting joy and with the after-flavour of regret.'

‘I know no regret, Demetrius, save that thou art awakened from that dream.’

‘Ah! Surely, Herennia, thou wilt know regret later. Now thou art unconscious and blind because thy husband is absent; but with his return remorse will torture thy heart for the wrong we have wrought him.’

‘I have no heart,’ she cries, ‘but for thee. I have never loved but thee. Bid me go with thee to the wilds of Mauritania or the snows of Moesia and I will quit all this splendour with no word of repining. Rather will I bless thee for my release from a bondage that has irked me sore. Dost thou not believe me, Demetrius? Put me, then, to the test.’

‘Alas! that is what I would not and dare not do. Thou forcest me to believe thee, unworthy as I am—and thou hast said it—of thy devotion. But that is part of the dream, and sooner or later thou, too, wouldst awaken.’

‘Never, while I have life and thou lovest me. Thou art not unworthy. Forget my taunting words. There was no meaning in them. My love ennobles thee; for I love thee, Demetrius—I love thee! See how I abase myself—proud Herennia! Hear how I plead, because I love thee!’

‘Domina, it is my place, not thine, to plead. Oh, if thou wouldst convince thyself, as I do, that it is best for thee and for me to forget our sinful love! Release me from the vows I swore to thee. Restore me to my better self. We have drunk of the Circean cup, and the very nature of us both has been changed. Thou, of whom no Roman dared to speak except in honour, didst sacrifice thy matronhood for my sake; and I, who have ever striven after virtue and good repute, have sunk myself to the lowest estate, and have loved thee, not with my soul, but with my body, as one who is mad with wine. Now the

madness is passed, and I see myself base and a traitor to the noble Pompeius, who trusted me. Let us part. Let me travel with Annæus to Massilia, and there meet Pompeius on his return journey. Then may I face thy husband with honest eyes of repentance, as might a steward who has stolen from the money-chest, and would replace with interest of double service illgotten treasure. One thing only would I ask of thee, Domina, before I bid thee farewell.'

'What is that thing?'

Her eyes glitter, and her tone is sharp as soldier's steel. He hesitates.

'I would ask thee if thou wouldst permit the Treverian maiden Astatha to join the family of Domitilla and Clemens, who know the girl, and, since thou carest not for her, would for her own sake befriend her. She is a slave, as thou sayest, and they would pay thee a good price.'

The rage of Herennia breaks its bonds.

'Now I know thee, Demetrius Othànes. Now I read truly thy false heart, in which another has supplanted me. Thou lovest Astatha?'

Othànes shrinks from the blaze of jealous fury. Saying nothing, he stands with face averted and head slightly bowed.

'Thou lovest Astatha? Speak! I will have an answer!'

Still he makes no reply.

'There is no need for thee to speak. Thy look convicts thee. Ah! fool that I have been to trust thee! Yet within me I knew thy falseness. In my secret soul I divined the truth. For this I would have given Astatha to Annæus. Since the day that thou first heardest her voice in the garden her spell has been cast upon thee. With the evil enchantments of her nation's gods has she

bewitched thee. Now I know why thou wouldst remove her to the family of Domitilla. It would be easier there for thee to woo her than here under the eyes of the betrayed mistress. I like thy cunning. Thou wouldst buy her from me by means of Domitilla, who has always hated me, and then thou wouldst free her, no doubt, and make her thy wife, since thou art no Roman patrician to be bound by the Latin customs—thy wife in all honour and virtue. Astatha the slave is worthy of that wedded honour and of the worship of thy better self, to which Herennia, the descendant of Rome's proudest heroes, must not dare to make a claim. And I—oh, ye gods!—I have loved him!

Othanes stretches out a beseeching hand.

'I pray thee, have mercy! Thou coverest me with shame! I have been a man torn, distracted! It is not that I do not honour thee, that I would not have wedded thee, had the Fates given me the power; but that in her I have received a revelation of what the true married union may be, and which makes all other unions seem vile and horrible.'

For a moment Herennia quails at his words, as though he had dealt her a blow, but she recovers herself and faces him proudly.

'I am thy true wife. It is I who have the first-fruits of thy heart. Thou thyself hast said it. I claim thee for mine, and I tell thee besides that love is marriage, and that the mummerly of priests means nothing. Such—holy, inviolable—have I counted my love for thee, and it is proof to me that thou art under a new and strange enchantment when thou speakest of our union as vile and horrible. Is it with the evil magic of Domitilla the Christian that Astatha has befooled thee and robbed me—her mistress and thy wife? Can it be that thou and she are converts to the new heresy? Did I not hear thee

swear by Christos that the maiden was fair, and at the time I paid no heed? It is this foreign superstition which holds thee.'

'Thou art wrong, Herennia. I am not yet a Christian, though I confess that the thought of a God-Father, upon whose divinity lies no shadow of human frailty, everlasting, unchangeable, longsuffering, and of great compassion, and of the God-Son, taking our manhood upon Him and crucified for the sins of the world, has a strange attraction for me. For Astatha I cannot answer. I can only again implore thee in the name of that Man-God to have pity upon her gentle womanhood.'

'Nay, I prefer the gods to whom I am accustomed, Demetrius, and to me there is an ignominy in the thought of a deity stretched on the malefactor's cross. Thou askest me for pity on the woman who has won thee from me by unnatural arts. Is it the nature of the Herennii and the Junii to spare those who have done them wrong? I warn thee that the teachers of this new heresy are suspected by Domitian, and that Flavius Clemens may be his next victim. Dost thou not know also that there is a shipload of hungry beasts in the vivarium, and that Rome clamours for a more exciting show than conflicts between Thrax and Mirmillo? How wouldst thou like to see thy fair one crushed between the jaws of a Libyan lion?'

Othanes turns white as ashes. For a few moments there is silence, broken only by the distant chattering of Greek copyists at work in the library, and the reproof of a silentarius enjoining quietude. Othanes seems lost in painful reflection. Presently he rouses himself, his face clear and determined, and, advancing a step, makes the salutation of a departing guest.

'Farewell, Domina. Between thee and me there are no more words to be spoken.'

As one dazed by a sudden blow, Herennia sees him

depart, making not any effort to detain him. The curtain of embroidery falls behind his retreating figure—he is gone. For several seconds the woman remains motionless, petrified with despair. Then an exceeding bitter cry escapes her.

‘Come back to me, my love, my king! Oh, gods of Olympus, shall the foul magic of the ass-worshipper conquer? Mother of the earth, Divine mourner, hear me! Hecate of the dark ways, suppliant of the sun, hear me! Korè, great in the kingdom of the dead—I, who have worshipped thee at thy Mother’s altar—hear me, and grant me thine aid!’

Herennia stretches out her arms to a small statue of Demeter, a copy of that one in the temple by the Alban hills. But the soft pure gaze of the Earth-mother seems to rebuke her passion, and impetuously she turns to an almost life-size Venus, which smiles upon her from a pedestal behind the couch where she and Demetrius have so often sat together. Not long since did she erect the image before which incense burns and fresh myrtle and violets are heaped. It has been her fancy to make of this chamber, consecrated to the first kiss of her lover, a temple of the goddess of love, to whom till lately she has scarcely paid allegiance. Now, beating her bosom, laid bare by her convulsed fingers, she flings herself before the marble figure which, bathed in sunshine from the court, seems a veritable breathing woman. Half kneeling, half leaning against the couch, her face distorted in its emotion, upraised to that of the goddess, she pours forth her passionate supplication.

‘Aphrodite all conquering, I invoke thy counsel! Here do I declare myself thy bondwoman and thy slave. Proud high Hera, and cold Demeter, henceforth I reclaim my vows. Thou, O Cyprian queen, receive my homage. Thou who didst constrain fair Helen, and hast lent thy

arts to Paris, do thou lend me also of thine enchantments to constrain him whom I love. Give me of thy divine wiles. Teach me some cunning device to rid me of the German maid, and to destroy the foreign magic by which she has stolen the heart of my king.'

Thus does she supplicate, clasping her breasts, tears streaming, sighs of anguish breaking her utterance.

'There is no soul; 'tis only the gods who are immortal. What is motherhood, what is wifehood, to me? His kisses only do I ask. Since it is with his body that he adored me, let his body be mine, and his soul—a fleeting phantom—may go where it will. Not Aphrodite, foam-born, in thy gladdest, purest aspect, but Kupris, do I invoke—Kupris, thy other shape, whom it is said that men have fashioned from their own lust, to thee I call. Enhance my beauty, give me back my lost youth, bestow upon me thine invincible charm. Give me his body, great queen; let who will possess his soul. And if thou deniest me, may Atè hear and grant me at least the sweetness of revenge.'

Thrice she utters the impious invocation. A great stillness falls upon the chamber. Herennia lies, sunken now upon the ground, her frame tense with expectation, her whole being strained in one immense desire.

'A sign, O goddess! Give me a sign!'

Again stillness. A supernatural dread seizes Herennia, and something of the old prescience long since dulled. She is conscious of having defied destiny; the warnings of Umbritius rush into her mind. She seems to behold, gazing as it were from out of some distant and indefinite past, the solemn eyes of the Flamen, piercing, pitiful, as they had gazed into her face when he had blessed her upon her marriage-day. She shivers as though Libitina had touched her. And then, as she believes, the sign is given.

Far off, from the court of the slaves, sounds a voice faint and plaintive, but clear as a silver bell and piercingly sweet. It rises and falls; in the distance it seems a supernatural echo of the savage lament of Astatha. Herennia raises herself; she listens. Thoughts chase each other visibly upon her countenance. She repeats aloud the words of Demetrius: 'The voice is sweet and wild, and sad as the note of Halcyon mourning her mate!'

Herennia bursts into a tuneless laugh.

"By the cross of Christos," he said, "she is fair; there is a strange magic in her voice!"

The woman starts to her feet. Her face is pale and set; her eyes glitter with deadly purpose.

'I have the sign,' she cried. 'Praise to thee, Kupris, and Atè the avenger. 'Twas the voice which bewitched him. Therein her magic rests. No more shall that voice enthrall him. Fool that I have been not to use my power sooner! She is a slave. The law gives me my right. Dumb, and an exile, she shall wander forth. To Pompeius I will say that she is dead.'

Hastily straightening her robe, she strikes with a glass wand upon a disc of metal, and immediately slaves hurry from the ante-chambers close by. She commands that Hector, her procurator, be summoned, and almost at the same moment her nomenclator draws aside the embroidered curtain, and announces that Fabricius Veiento desires audience of the noble Herennia.

Herennia waves an impatient denial. She is in no mood for Veiento's cynical gossip, and more or less open love-making, which of late she has somewhat encouraged in order to draw attention from her infatuation for Othanes. She fears lest Pompeius be informed of this infatuation by a jealous rival. But she has discovered that the fire with which she has been playing is dangerous.

Before the nomenclator has taken the refusal, a change comes over her face. She bids him be recalled.

'I will see Veiento. Let Hector wait my orders.'

Two yellow-haired maidens of Samos busy themselves in adjusting their lady's loosened hair and in disposing anew the folds of her purple palla. Herennia submits, hardly noticing them, so absorbed is she in meditation.

'No more than a touch,' says one. 'My lady is most beautiful with tresses flowing, but the gold-dust has fallen, and such pale cheeks become better the votary of Pallas, than one who burns incense before the goddess of Joy and Love, who of all the Immortals is greatest.'

'Thou believest, then, that Aphrodite is all-great, Aglaia, and that the goddess grants the prayers of her suppliants?'

'I know it, Madam, for a certainty; more especially when they are accompanied by offerings rare and delicate. Is it not commonly reported how Hippias has secured the fidelity of Hermes the gladiator?—the story makes much merriment in the school. 'Twas by the sacrifice of her favourite white nightingale—a bird unrivalled since the talking nightingale of Agrippina, and white, which is a prodigy, and the more pleasing to the gods. Hippias cut out the nightingale's tongue, and laid it on Venus' altar, whereat the bird bled and pined and died; but Hermes is faithful. And if thou, lady——'

'Peace! Thy chattering annoys me;' and Herennia strikes the Greek sharply with the glass wand she still holds, so that the girl retires weeping.

'Summon Veiento;' and, turning to another of the maids, she says, 'To-morrow I, too, will sacrifice a tongue to Venus, and it shall be the tongue of a rare nightingale.'

Veiento, sleek, cruel, and sensual, offers her his salutation. He presents her with a book, which he takes from the hand of a slave, whom he dismisses with a sign.

‘It is a new edition of the famous Codicils, fair Herennia, which are beginning almost to repay what they cost me in confiscation and banishment, so eagerly are they bought and read. Graciously give the volume a place in thy library.’

It is an exquisitely bound roll on a golden stick with jewelled ends, and Herennia accepts it with an air of pre-occupation not lost on Veiento. He is a man of the world, and tries to beguile her from her gloom with fashionable small-talk—the gossip of the Palatine; the newest divorce; stories of the Emperor’s caprices. The last is Flavius Clemens’ impending disgrace, and Domitian’s threats of extirpating the new sect of Christians.

‘Soon we shall have the prisons choking as in Nero’s reign, and if thou hast an enemy, fair Herennia, whom thou wouldst like removed for a time or for eternity, command me, and I will arrange the matter.’

‘For a time!’ repeats Herennia, as if to herself; and her eyes narrow thoughtfully.

Veiento, observing her, sees that his random shot has hit the mark. She adds, with an assumption of gaiety:

‘I thank thee. Thou art in great favour with Cæsar, and can arrange most matters as it pleases thee. Is it not so, Veiento?’

‘No, by the girdle of Venus!’ He glances at the marble statue opposite him. ‘It rejoices me to see that thou hast forsaken high-browed Demeter for a warmer divinity, and Eros grant that this change in thee bode well for my ardent longings! No, there is one matter I cannot arrange as I please, or it would have been arranged long ere now. And in this event Cæsar is powerless, for it depends on the whim of a woman.’

‘Women are to be bought, Veiento—if not with money, then with might; and through Cæsar thou hast command of both money and might.’

'Thou knowest the wish of my heart, fair Herennia. By Pallas! my patience has been long as that of Troy's besiegers. For ten years have I sued thee in vain. Thou art the one woman who has balked my desire, thereby continually renewing it. Thou art the one woman for whom passion consumes me, causing me nightly and daily torment. My pangs are only assuaged by the sight of thy beauty, which at the same time inflames them.' He bends audaciously, and kisses her bared shoulder and the round arm visible between the jewelled fastenings of her loose sleeve. 'I have sworn a mighty oath, cruel Herennia, that I will *not* be balked. When I am near thee I would fain crush thee against my breast, and carry thee off as the Quirites carried off the Sabine maids. But I dare not, lest thou shouldst for ever after scorn and hate me. Now I wait Venus' counsel for the snare that shall lure thee to my arms. Jewels, I know, will not buy thee. Lands will not tempt thee. To charms and philtres—and many a priest of Serapis have I consulted concerning thee—thou art invulnerable. Yet at this moment something whispers in my ear—all hail to thee, goddess!—that revenge may be thy price.'

She coquets with him; cleverly draws and then holds him off; is bold in the fascinations she employs, cunning in her reserve. He extracts from her a vague promise, a half-caress; she will not give her lips. She fences; it is brilliant play. She harks back to the humours of Cæsar, the intrigues at Court.

'Thou didst ask if I had an enemy, Veiento.'

'Doubtless thou hast many. All beautiful women have enemies in jealous friends and rejected lovers.'

'It is true. There is a man I would punish—a man who interferes with my projects and obstructs my will. I would have him out of my way.'

'Nothing easier. Tell me his name, and I will denounce

him as an accomplice in the Clemens conspiracy, or I'll call him a Christian and devote him to the lions.'

Herennia gives an involuntary shudder. Beneath her carmine she turns deadly pale. A second time she feels the grip of that supernatural dread; it is as the clutch of an icy hand. Her voice sounds hollow and far-away; but she forces herself to speak quietly:

'No, not that. I do not wish him to die. I only wish that he should be imprisoned on some trifling charge—suspicion of conspiracy, disrespect to the gods, anything, so that there be no public accusation, for that again would defeat my purpose. You could arrange it?'

'Perfectly. When I leave thee I go to the Palatine. If thou desirest, no doubt the Pretorians would have their orders to-night.'

'To-night! And there would be no danger?'

'Of what?'

Her voice becomes husky again.

'Of the lions.'

'Sweet Herennia, it wants three weeks to the games, unless Cæsar sees fit to hurry them. Besides, citizens of Rome are not given to the beasts in the arena.'

'This man is not a citizen of Rome. He is a Greek.'

'His name?'

She hesitates; then says, without a tremor:

'Demetrius Othànes.'

Veiento gives a curious laugh.

'I suspected it.'

Herennia has not sufficient collectedness to mark the faint note of triumph; he is too keen a man of the world to make it over-apparent. Of these subtleties Dorothea in her double consciousness is aware; the fact strikes her as fourth-dimensional.

'As to the imprisonment,' Veiento continues, 'there will be no difficulty. Othànes is a frequent visitor at the house

of Clemens and Domitilla; the good folk are true Flavians, of the late god Vespasian's type, in their indifference to the rank of their acquaintances. But our enlightened lord god Domitian Cæsar is of haughtier pretensions. He has not waited till his apotheosis is sanctioned by the Senate, but has enrolled himself already among the Olympians, and will brook no interference from god Christos the malefactor. He will agree readily enough to the incarceration of any suspected of that vulgar foreign superstition.'

'Wait.' Herennia moves half irresolute. 'I have not yet said it is to be.'

Veiento glances at a water-clock running low.

'I pray you make your decision. Time passes. I am almost due at the Palatine. Shall I speak to Cæsar or not?'

'No, Veiento; the thought of the lions—terror of the old persecution—comes upon me. I am afraid——'

'Thou mayest rest assured that the man's skin will remain intact, unless thou desirest otherwise. I charge myself with his release at thy bidding, provided always that I am not myself so unfortunate as to incur great Cæsar's displeasure. Does that content thee?'

Her dilated eyes, fixed on vacancy, seem to see visions of horror. She lifts her hand to her brow as though to shut them out; her mind sways. In that impulse of doubt she might almost have altered her determination; but from the slaves' quarter echoes a second time that wild chant of the Treverian maid. Herennia's arm falls to her side; her features stiffen.

'It shall be done.'

'Good. And when done, fairest Herennia, I claim my reward. The lips thou dost now so cruelly refuse me shall then be my own.'

She suffers him to kiss her neck. He puts his arm

around her. She trembles, shrinks with repulsion, then permits the embrace. But as his ardour increases, and he tries to enfold her more closely, she deftly escapes.

‘Remember, the reward is not yet earned.’

‘I go to take the first step towards that end. To-night thou shalt receive word, and mayst sleep in peace, knowing that thy enemy is safely lodged in the Mamertine Prison. May I ask why he is thy enemy?’

‘Because he influences my stepson against me. The boy is in love with one of my slaves—a barbarian maid who is beautiful. I wish to place this girl out of Annæus’ reach. In this Othanes thwarts me.’

‘Really! I had always understood that in Rome one’s slave was one’s slave. Therefore I do not quite follow the order of thy reasoning. Still, I am not a teacher of dialectics, and truly the love affairs of thy stepson with a barbarian are no concern of mine.’

‘If thou wouldst know more, Othanes is in the confidence of my husband. I do not wish my doings in Rome reported to Pompeius.’

‘Now I understand. On that ground I also should consider Othanes’ presence inconvenient. He will be much safer in the Mamertine. But as regards the girl, a simple expedient occurs to me. Nobody asks questions about slaves. Why not give her to the lions? It is unnecessary to wait for the games. The beasts require feeding. A friend of mine the other day had a refractory slave thrown into the vivarium, and thereby saved himself some trouble and the State a dinner’s cost.’

His cold-blooded manner reawakes Herennia’s doubts.

‘How little thou carest for human life! It is true that she is a slave, but she is the kinswoman of Veleda. . . . Can I trust thee, Veiento?’

‘To have her thrown to the beasts and no questions asked?’

'No—in the matter of Othànès' release.'

Veiento shrugged his shoulders.

'I am a Roman, not a Greek. Thou shouldst be able to accept my word—under the limitations I have named. I can answer for myself. I cannot answer for Cæsar. Now to the Palatine. The girl is thy business, not mine.'

'True. And in the other matter thou understandest that despatch is needful. To-morrow Annæus goes to Baïæ with Regulus. Othànès remains behind. It is arranged between them. In two days the Saturnalia begins and the slaves are at liberty. I have therefore but two days.'

'When the Saturnalia is over, it will be supposed that both have been kidnapped, or that—which is more probable—they have run away together. I distrust the ardour of thy enemy Demetrius on behalf of Annæus' tender hopes. It is more likely that he himself loves the Treverian maid; and since he is the son of a slave, and there appears a grave doubt whether he was ever manumitted by his illustrious sire Corbulo, the pair would be well matched.'

With this parting shot he leaves her. For several minutes she sits brooding darkly, on her face a sombre light like that which plays over a sullen sea when the storm is stayed. As she broods she murmurs brokenly:

'It is the will of the Immortals. Aphrodite has given the sign, Atè the counsel. The gods are mighty. They alone direct the destinies of men.'

Astatha's magic rune, haunting the air, drives the woman to fresh frenzy.

'Sing on, little fool, sing on! It is not for many hours. Weave spells. They'll soon be broken. And thy wings clipped, pretty dove, and thy piping stilled. More costly, O goddess, than a thousand doves, rarer than

the most tuneful nightingale, will be the bloody gift I shall lay upon thy altar. . . . No shrieks, no tales; only struggles inarticulate—dumb moanings. . . . Horrible! But I suffer—gods, how I suffer! And shall I not have payment for my pain? Is it the nature of a Roman woman to endure scorn from a slave? By all the gods in heaven, if he were of a truth hers, not mine, I'd kill him too! I'd let the beasts have him. But he is mine—mine from the beginning; as all my being leaped to him, so his to me. His fancy for the girl is no true love, no lusty passion. Passion does not deal in souls, and it's their souls, he says, are married. Oh, souls! souls! I care naught for soul. Hast thou a soul, O goddess? Thou art immortal, and hast no need; and so is love immortal, and has no need of soul. Astatha is the dream; *I* am the life. Once gone and the enchantment broken, he will forget her; and all the sooner if Hector swears she's dead—or false. Dead—died delicately. That's best. And then no one will seek her. And Hector shall sell her to Massa the Numidian, and ship her over-seas. Massa knows of uses for fair maids, and better uses if there be no tongue to prate with. . . .'

She broods on. Her look changes; her features soften.

'And thou, Demetrius, my king, my eternal mate, I will not believe that the Parcae wove into my destiny the white thread of thy love to cut it so soon in twain. I will not believe that I waited through all those barren years till I met thee that I should now be mocked and despoiled. Oh, gladly enough in nights to come wouldst thou pillow thy head on Herennia's bosom. Gladly enough, after fear and doubt and hardship, wilt thou welcome me when I come to thee in thy prison and tell thee it is I who have interceded for thy release; that I have given up all my possessions for thy sake; that in

thine exile I will be thy solace; that to my love, and my love alone, thou owest thy life. Then will thy heart leap to mine as before, and with the old passion thou wilt embrace me. Then wilt thou remember the rose-crowned days and the sweet swooning nights. Then, know I well, wilt thou be ready to fare away with me—away from Rome's hideous frolic and lurid splendour, shining hollow between the ribs of death—away to some myrtle-grown isle of Greece, where blue waves woo the golden sands and all Nature is one caress—away to the land of song and story which thou hast painted to me, the home of our dear glad gods. There shall thine arms enfold me, and the dusk of protecting Zeus encompass us, as the divine cloud encompassed Io. There shall thy kisses pour upon me like the golden rain on Danae. And oh, my joy, my divinity! so shall I, blest by Aphrodite's favour, grow young and fair, and ever fairer. And so shall our love endure without end or decline. For when Korè calls thee to her kingdom, then will I, unsummoned, break voluntarily the doors of Hades, and following thee to the Elysian Plain, we two shall couch in fields of asphodel, and kiss anew in ecstasy undying.'

Carried away by the rapture of her vision, Herennia leans forward, her face transfigured by emotion, her arms extended as though to meet the embracing mist which falls upon her and covers her from Dorothea's sight.

* * * * *

A flash!—oh, heaven! in mercy but a flash!—of the grisly vision revealed to Dorothea in Pat O'Leary's drawing-room, when Kaia Aldenning had sung 'Nìyà ninda kà-āia—kà-āia,' gazing as she sang into the face of Gavan Sarel.

Then had the old love wakened from sleep, then had the old enchantment, broken nearly two thousand years ago, renewed itself once more. Then had the jealous

Roman woman who wrought that evil deed suffered the first keen pang of expiatory torture. This now Dorothea knows through her subtler senses. Again the agony tears her, but ten thousand times more cruelly. She would have veiled her sight, but a will stronger than hers forces her to look.

And with the knowledge of her guilt, Dorothea's being—body and soul—are wrenched by the pain her former self had inflicted upon another. Every nerve and fibre in her suffers a torture too exquisite to be put into words, as she sees the blood spout in crimson streams, and fall in great gouts, staining the white robes of Astatha, who, bound, helpless, a lamb in the slaughter-shed, faints under the knife of those Ethiopian butchers.

‘Oh, Christ, in pity deliver me from my hell!’ cries the wretched woman who has worked this evil deed.

* * * * *

It seems to Dorothea that she, too, awakens from unconsciousness, and what has happened in the interim is hidden from her. Her brain is dazed and her faculties are numbed. She has become a spectator, and has ceased to be a victim.

In the air sounds a roar like that made by a huge multitude. There is a feeling of excitement at keenest pitch, a sense of mighty forces waiting the moment of liberation—forces both moral and physical; the sense of danger, fear, horror, and thrilling expectancy. Now of brute propensities at the point of being unleashed, now of more complex and deadlier powers of evil. And yet underlying the riot of animalism she is conscious of something sublime, awesome, unconquerable, of potencies purely spiritual—fortitude, faith, the fanaticism of martyrdom. It is the victory of the Beast on earth, the triumph of God in heaven.

Here the life of a stupendous civilization has concentrated itself. This is not the Forum, not the temple of Rome's guardian deity, not the political arena nor the palace of Cæsar. Dorothea is gazing at the interior of a vast circular building, which she has no difficulty in recognising as the colossal amphitheatre built under the Flavian dynasty, begun by Vespasian, opened by Titus, completed by Domitian.

The crowd has already thronged in through the various vomitoria. From wall to wall sounds the deep-throated murmur of many thousand tongues. At moments the roar is deafening, and mingling with it a thunder, hoarse, subterranean—the voices of beasts caged below, impatient for their prey. The great circle is one immense sea of human beings. High up beneath the velarium, the upper row, mainly sailors, is almost hidden by festoons of flowers and ivy, while a little lower, bands of heads and forms spread indefinite of outline and tint. Descending in wider tiers the colours grow distincter and more brilliant. Glints of metal show out; and faint coruscations from gemmed buckles on men's garments and ornaments on the persons of light women from the Suburra play amid the mass, intensifying towards the equestrian benches, which appear a many-hued parterre of togas, cloaks and tunics in purple, vermilion, and orange.

Lower still shines a broad band of spectators, composed of the rank and fashion of Rome, its ground dazzling white, but streaked and patched with purple, gold, and crimson, and irradiated by the flash of magnificent jewels—spoils of many a conquered province. Here sit the men of consular rank, the officers of state, the wealthiest and noblest of Rome's citizens; the patrician ladies in robes of glittering stuff; the Vestals; and in the centre, on a great raised dais, covered and canopied with draperies of scarlet, purple, and gold, lictors and pretorians for its background,

sits Cæsar, enthroned in state and surrounded by his Court.

Ave Cæsar ! embodiment of world-sovereignty.

He is clad in an amethystine mantle, the imperial scarlet showing beneath. Upon his half-bald head is set a chaplet of gold, on which twinkle dewdrops of immense diamonds. Round his thick neck he wears a collar of rubies and brilliants. His bloated face, disfigured with sores, deadly pale, save where an unhealthy blush, deep blood-colour, suffuses his brow and cheeks, is terrible in its envenomed arrogance. His eyes are sinister, furtive, as he glances from time to time towards some part of the building where the noise is greatest, on the watch for plaudits or for signs of disloyalty which may demand for the wild dogs an unprepared victim. The carriage of his head is insolent and shameless as that of a maniac believing himself a god—and in truth, has not Domitian usurped the symbols of divinity ?

The priests of the sacred college, ranged in the grand circle, hold themselves restrained, shrinking, as though dreading the wrath of outraged deities. Dorothea searches the row for the Flamen of Jupiter's noble countenance, but he is not present at this scene of carnage.

Beneath the gold-fringed canopy of the podium, on a slightly lower level, and at either side of Cæsar's throne, are set two chairs of state. The Empress occupies one of these—Domitia, daughter of Corbulo. Strange, Dorothea thinks, that she should be the half-sister of Demetrius Othanes. She is a small, thin woman, with a handsome but ill-tempered face, of which the settled sadness is partly concealed by a liberal use of rouge and the skilful pencilling of eyelashes and eyebrows, while its beauty is enhanced by her magnificent dress and the profusion of jewels she wears. Domitia is restless, evidently highly strung, and

affects a cynical sprightliness which at moments amuses the pleasure-sated Emperor.

In the second chair sits Julia, daughter of Titus, to whom Domitian addresses an occasional word. Heavy, sensuous-looking, with beautiful arms and exquisitely-shaped hands, her power over Domitian is that of mere physical attraction; for she has neither wit nor loveliness, except the fleshly charm of her large shapely body and those white hands, hymned by Martial, who now hovers behind, waiting an opportunity to deliver some long-thought-out and obsequious epigram.

The petty intrigues, the vanities, the great horrors, the hidden tragedies, and the abominable depravities of this Court circle press simultaneously upon the brain and nerves of Dorothea, and afflict her with sickening nausea. Julia, like the Empress, is loaded with jewels. Her neck is almost hidden under strings of emeralds and pearls. Pendants of diamonds and pearls fall from her elaborately frizzed head, and her pretty fingers glisten with rings. She sways a fan encrusted with diamonds, which gives out moving lights, obscured presently by a light rain of rose-petals and a soft spray of perfumes falling from the tented ceiling. Saffron is shed down, too, upon the sand of the arena, and the reek of beasts and men gives place to the fragrance of verbena water spouting from fountains placed in different parts of the huge building.

The scene exhilarates Cæsar, and when pipes beneath the velarium begin to send down a rarer and stronger perfume, the air becomes almost intoxicating. He talks more animatedly, gives a sign for the rain of rose-petals to cease that he may look round the rows of spectators, and presently whispers to a small-headed boy in red, his pet monstrosity, who kneels on the edge of the daïs at his feet. There are uneasy glances and mutterings among the patricians, for who can tell what fell purpose may be

communicated in the dwarf's ear? Which one of these men knows whether at this moment his own name may not be written on the Emperor's tablets in the list of the condemned?

Fabricius Veiento, the infamous Carus, the no less infamous Boebius Massa, and others of their kind, stand in easy assurance, secure of safety while certain vilenesses schemed for the Emperor's pleasure remain yet unperpetrated. Veiento has the courage to attract Cæsar's attention, and to direct his gaze to the crimson-cushioned seats beyond the Vestals, where, laughing and chattering, betting-tablets conspicuous in their hands, and lovers thronging close behind, sit the greatest ladies of Rome. Here beside Hippias, who has received her cue, and upon whose face is an expression of malign triumph, reclines Herennia.

She is more beautiful to the ardent eyes of Veiento than any lady in that exhibition of loveliness, more beautiful even than when as a girl she captivated Pompeius, or as a bride inspired Veiento with that evil passion which has never in these years been extinguished. Her matchless form is veiled in Greek robes of thin, gold-woven stuff which, where their folds are lightest, and the purple and gold palla falls back, reveal her rosy shoulders and arms, more perfect in shape than those of Aphrodite. Her gold-powdered hair, not tortured into the fantastic erection which surmounts the heads of many of her companions, is simply parted on her brow and coiled in a Greek knot, while above her forehead scintillates a sun of priceless precious stones. Her great dark eyes glow feverishly, and are sad with an unnameable fear. Her heart beats and her bosom melts now with this vague dread, and now with thrilling anticipations, for to-night Veiento has promised that she shall herself bear to the Mamertine, Cæsar's mandate for her lover's release. To-night the pain of

her longing, the bitterness of her regret, will be turned into rapture, and all the sadness of these days of separation will be forgotten in Demetrius' arms.

Hippia has beguiled her to the amphitheatre to lighten these weary hours of waiting. Moreover, her dramatic instinct impels her. She will show herself at her best and bravest. This, her last appearance in Roman society, shall be a brilliant one. She will fool Veiento to his bent; she will dazzle the Imperial circle by her beauty and her splendour. No one shall suspect that to-morrow she will have bidden good-bye to her state and magnificence; that to-morrow she will be sailing forth towards the blue Egean, having given up the world for love—no one but Hippia, to whom in a weak moment she has confided her secret.

Her moods alternate. Lulled by voluptuous fancy, she leans back listlessly, dreaming of joys to come, and paying little heed to what is going on in the arena. Only at some louder roar of acclamation, some multitudinous cry of 'Euge! . . . Habet! . . . Macte! . . .' or some such expression of ferocious satisfaction or discontent, does she rouse herself, applauding the herculean feats of Carcophorus, whom Hippia has backed heavily, or the fight of the dwarfs, a spectacle Cæsar has provided, and which has been the milder excitement of the morning games. She has also been languidly interested by the mechanism of the moving grove out of which the beast-slayer springs to his conflict with a tigress from the Hyrcanian mountains. She won some money on this encounter, and now, spurred by the thought that these are the last games she may ever witness, and that all she wins to-day will be so much added to the wealth she carries away with her to Greece, she bets furiously, making a heavy book on the gladiatorial combat about to begin.

In pleased expectation of bloodshed the roar of voices

becomes a dull thunder. The betting goes more briskly as the dramatic moment approaches. Now a salvo of trumpets proclaims the entrance of this army of picked fighters. The Emperor looks up from his whispered colloquy with the dwarf. He scans his jewelled tablets, and speaks to a man in purple standing on the steps of the dais. The man in purple grows pale ; he has dared to bet against the Emperor's faction.

To blast of trumpets and clash of swords the procession files, defiles, and halts. The Emperor's large dull eyes give a watery gleam ; he points out to Julia the gladiators whom he favours. What magnificent men ! Gauls, Samnites, Germans, Thracians, some helmeted and mailed, some naked but for a loincloth, their grand limbs polished as marble, the muscles of their breasts and shoulders tense and firm and shining as in the bronze torso of a Hercules ; some, again, slender, supple, fleet-footed, flourishing net and trident.

‘ Ave Cæsar ! Morituri te salutant ! ’

Out rings the death-chant, rising and falling in vibrating cadence. The parties divide and engage. Impossible at first to realize that the battle is real and no pantomimic fight. In twos at first, then in bands of fives and tens and twenties, naked and armed. Blood streams. Glazed eyes upturn ; quivering hands are raised, begging for mercy. Julia's soft thumb follows Cæsar's as he gives the death-signal. The doomed are pierced, and the victor becomes the vanquished. Swiftly are the corpses drawn away by masked attendants dressed to represent the servants of Pluto. Upon the yellow sand show great crimson patches. More scent ; more flowers ; nevertheless the blood-reek is as that of the shambles.

Herennia closes her eyes. Oh, if love has taught her nothing else, surely through it she realizes that human flesh has its own sanctity. Each of the slain may be

mourned by a woman to whom he is dear. And then the grim irony of a death-blow dealt by a comrade—a companion in the school! Better the tearing asunder by wild beasts than this slaughter of man by man.

It is over! Could she have believed that she would have turned so squeamish? The floor is raked clean, and new sprinkled. The moving grove is again fixed. From its openings the lions and tigers will presently issue. The centre of the arena is a rocky plateau with here and there a group of stunted pines. Among the trees of the grove dryads sport with nymphs of the glade, and satyrs and fauns clad in goatskins spread saffron upon the stained sand. In the hands of the satyrs, hidden under guise of the vine-wreathed thyrsus, are scourges to drive forward the victims. These flock in through an opening veiled by foliage. Some are slaves who have been told that their hope of liberty lies in an effective rendering of the masque, and in successful conflicts with the beasts, for which end they are given stakes twined with ivy, and lighted torches. They are men chosen for the vigour of their frames, their great stature and strength of limb. Others, and the larger number, are Christians without hope save that of being attacked in some vital part and speedily made an end of. These are dressed as women, many wearing grotesque masks, who represent in spiritless fashion a congregation of Bacchanals reposing, in suggestion of the Euripidean drama, amid the pines and rocks of Cithæron.

Now enters a revel-rout of vine-garlanded Mænads, crested Corybantes, thyrsus-bearing votaries. They brandish boughs of oak, and dance with wanton gestures to the crash of music—timbrels ringing, cymbals clashing, Phrygian flutes calling shrilly. Their dappled fawnskins, fastened by mechanical serpents, become misplaced. The serpents, moved by springs, thrust out forked tongues, and add their metallic hisses to the frantic music of the

simulated orgie. For all, goaded by spear-points and leaded scourges, are urged to an exhibition of clumsy merriment. The populace shouts in glee; the patrician benches mark their approval of the spectacle. Cæsar gives a sign to prolong the ghastly frolic, more piquant for the terror behind it.

Now, at a brutal signal from the satyrs, the sleepers arise and scatter in a dazed fashion. A bellowing of cattle is heard, and the snorting of maddened bulls, which rush furious from the grove. Molossian dogs spring, eager with hunger; wolves, wild-boars, and many savage animals of the forest, emerge from various leaf-screened openings. They leap upon the Bacchanals, and no longer may the Euripidean legend be enacted faithfully. It is the beasts who slay, and not the beasts who are slain. As the trembling Bacchanals are torn limb by limb, and after a time the sated beasts retire, mumbling their prey, to dark corners, the rocks in the centre of the arena split of themselves, the groups of pines disappear, and more victims are revealed, more Bacchanals are driven forward.

Now there is a halt in the action—the beasts are not ready for the onslaught; the Libyan lions have turned refractory—and from the depths of the grove may be heard the cries of the keepers, and the whizz of long lashes spurring up the sulky monsters. As the Bacchanals stand surveying the vast circle, applause bursts from the audience, indifferent to the fact that in face of doom the mummers have forgotten their parts. For it is evident that the finest men have been reserved for the lions, and that, since each carries an ivy-twined spear, the fight will be more exciting than the wholesale carnage which has just taken place.

A little flutter of interest and curiosity stirs the groups round Domitian's dais; so also among the patrician ladies. There is a brief hush. The pause seems breathless, so intense is the expectation. Presently a mighty growl

rends the low murmur in the upper part of the amphitheatre, and a great tawny lion advances with slavering tongue protruded and big eyes aflame. Herennia leans against Hippias, sickened and faint. The beast glares at the nearer band of spectators, and makes a rush against the revolving bar which protects the podium, and which thrusts him back again. Women shriek, and the Prætorians dart a lance or two into the arena. Again Dorothea's identity becomes merged in that of Herennia, and the Woman of Yesterday and the Woman of To-day are one, both gripped by a horror so deadly that for the moment she fights against it, as a man might fight the Foul Fiend, whom he yet knows to be a creation of his own distorted imagination.

'Look ! look !' whispers Hippias. 'See—the Bacchante to the right whose eyes are upon us ! By all the gods, it is Othanes !'

Four more lions have advanced from different parts of the grove. They crouch and growl within a few feet of the band of martyrs, who stand, spear-poised, ready for the attack. Now one of the brutes, in an overpowering rush, lifts a mighty paw and fells its first victim. Another victim is seized in the act of hurling his spear, and the horrible sound of crunched bones is heard through the theatre. The mob hoots in derision, and there are calls for Carcophorus to show the Christian cowards how a brave man may fight with beasts.

Herennia has risen. Clutching Hippias's hand to steady herself, she stares with wild eyes into the arena, in the direction which Hippias has indicated. She is a little short-sighted ; the place swims, and seems an immense moving screen seen through a veil of blood. She is a prominent object as she bends forward among that row of lovely ladies, easily distinguishable by the man at the right end of the line, who has cast aside his Bacchanal's garments

and the tangled wreath of ivy which partly concealed his features. Heedless of the lions, his spear held upright, Othanes searches the glittering zone for the woman whom he now knows has betrayed him.

So the eyes of these two meet—*then*, across the blood-stained arena ; *now*, from either side of the abyss of ages. From the man's eyes darts a passionate hate ; yet they are drawn to the woman by an overwhelming physical fascination, which is at once desire and loathing. How beautiful she is ! What madness to have slighted her ! Is she not an embodiment to him of the world he is leaving ? And does not that show of soft raiment, of woman's charms, of luxury, and all the suggested joys of baser love, represent to him life—life forfeited and irreclaimable ? For mere existence the lower self of him would at this moment barter his soul's hope of heaven. He is torn by an almost brute yearning for air, movement in the open, food, drink, pure material enjoyment, and for the power, above all, to use this woman as the instrument of such enjoyment, and then to scorn and punish her for having worked his ruin. In this supreme moment he is not thinking of Astatha and the holier happiness of which she has given him a fleeting vision ; it is not the spiritual affinity, but the fleshly attraction, which binds him.

The memory of dreamy spring days and of intoxicating nights rises in that bloody chasm between him and the glittering circle. Oh, if he could spring to that vile and glorious woman and drag her down, forcing her to share the horrible fate to which she has condemned him, and, while he kisses her lips, feel the lion's jaws close upon them both, and whisper in her throat dying words of mingled hatred and love ! All this she reads in his eyes—knows for a surety without that bitter cry which arises from the arena :

‘Wanton ! with my dying lips I curse thee !’

Then the woman's voice shrills forth, filling the vast theatre, so piercing is its note of agony :

'Spare me, Demetrius ! I love thee ; I did not mean to kill thee ! Mercy ! O Cæsar, mercy !'

Too late ; the lion has sprung. Herennia falls senseless, and darkness closes round Dorothea

BETWEEN THE SCENES

THE gray light of early dawn crept into the studio, and Dorothea awoke to material life. At first she could not believe that it was the actual world of London in which she found herself, so strong was her feeling of unreality. But this she knew was due to the fact that something tremendous had happened to her, and that in this happening, a great gulf lay between this morning and yesterday.

For a few moments she fancied that she must have died in the night, and was now in the Beyond; but gradually her senses came into play, and recognised the familiar objects in her studio. She touched the rug that covered her and the cushions of her sofa, raising herself to look at things in the room. Oddly enough, what first convinced her that she was alive was a spot of ink upon one of the cushions. It had been made one evening not so long ago by the accidental dripping of Sarel's stylographic pen, while he argued out with her a question of Progressivist policy.

She had been expounding to him Ravage's views upon the most salient points of difference, and he had been taking notes of these in his methodical way, while she had tried to show him how easy and how expedient it would be for him to bring his own ideas into harmony with those of the Liberal leader. He had at last acknowledged the justice of her arguments, had promised to weigh them carefully;

and so it had been that that evening's talk had practically decided the Coalition.

She remembered that talk vividly, not so much because of its political consequences, as because of the marked change she had then observed in his demeanour towards her. She reflected that this must have been shortly after his first meeting with Kaia at Kilburra. There had been nothing in his manner she could have found fault with: its even suavity had been remarkable. He had been most courteous, most considerate, most friendly. He had spoken of his gratitude, of all he owed her, had accepted her suggestions with deference, had been tender in an undemonstrative fashion. She had told herself that the absence of demonstration might well be accounted for by the serious interests engrossing him. Still, the fact had remained, and had rankled terribly. He had shown no emotion: he had been the friend, not the lover.

It was strange that, looking back upon that evening, and understanding so fully the reason of that change in him, she seemed to feel none of the bitterness she had felt at the time. Almost could she fancy that the episode belonged to another existence—one of those Yesterdays of which she and Charafta had spoken. But she knew by a dozen trifles—the dress she wore, the unfinished picture on her easel, the position of the chairs, the heap of ashes on the hearth, that only a few hours of darkness—not dreaming centuries—separated her from that yesterday. The strange thing also was that, though she remembered the suffering she had gone through as the worst she had ever experienced, it was no longer present with her. Her capacity for feeling seemed numbed, and a peace enveloped her, such as may come to the soul after some great spiritual revelation. She dimly realized that a revelation of that kind had actually taken place. She had been ignorant,

now she knew ; she had been blind, now she saw ; she had been mad, now she was sane.

This restful lassitude was indescribably soothing. With the subsidence of emotional tumult, her former passion of desire and hate seemed to have fallen quite away. She no longer wished to punish Sarel. The clearest thought in her mind, when she could follow the sequence of mundane events, was that she must communicate with Sebastian Blythe as soon as might be, and cancel that half-implied permission to give the man she had loved to the beasts. Yet had she in sober truth loved Sarel ? She asked herself how much of glamour there had been in her love—now that the mystery behind it had been dimly revealed. If her love had been what she had believed it, why, now that he was taken from her, not by death, but by perfidy of his own, should she have this strange sense of calm and fulfilment ? Was it that destiny had indeed fulfilled itself ? And Dorothea, the sane Dorothea, almost laughed in whimsical amusement at the grandiloquence of the phrase ; then, recalling Charafta and the dreams of the night, was seized with wondering awe.

Dorothea thought of Charafta's simile of the oyster. Did not all the pain and doubt and hopelessness in the world come from the fact that men and women are mere human oysters, knowing nothing of the larger mystery of the universe, seeing nothing outside the shell enclosing them, which they call environment, circumstance, fate, as the case may be ? What wonder that love is only pain when it can look forward to no assured joy beyond the darkness of the grave ? But to have the experience of even one moment of wider vision, to gain, though in no more than a flash, the certainty of further earthly opportunity for the retrieving of error and the renewing of love, to know that one's life of to-day is but as the mark of a pinpoint on the Scroll of Time, that according to the past

so shall be the future, and that man is no slave of destiny, but its master—that would in truth be soul-feeding revelation.

And if such vision had been vouchsafed her in this crisis of her own fate, if those dreams of the night were not dreams, but realities—things that had been, the parent causes of things that should be; and if through the Law which decrees growth by suffering she had realized, however faintly, the undying Love guiding always to ultimate good—why, then, should she marvel at her own calm? Would this not be inevitable, natural? Might she not well stand quiet and trustful, believing, hoping, understanding?

Fantastic as the reasoning might appear under normal conditions, it now seemed logically possible that the story of her present relation with Gavan Sarel was the working to their end of previous causes—a sort of automatic sequel to the drama of the Past. By condemning Othànes to a violent death in their joint Roman life, she had arrested vital forces at the moment of their intensest energy. Had not her school primers taught her as one of Nature's laws, that force may be transmuted, but cannot be annihilated? And if this were true of physical force, why not of Life, of Will—the most stupendous in their effects of all forces? And these vital forces, set in action further ages back than she could reckon, were they now exhausted? For she had been shown that the Roman life was only one act of the drama. In how many previous acts had she and Sarel played their appointed parts? Was it when, for love of the Greek soldier, Demeter's priestess had broken her vows that their fate had become intertwined? Or had that Greek soldier then renewed a sacrilegious passion, for which the life Demetrius Othànes subsequently paid, had been an insufficient penalty? And for herself, how had she earned the double punishment? When would the tangle be un-

ravelled and the expiation complete? When would the Closed Door be opened, and the Initiate regain forfeited privileges? When might she kneel at the feet of Asphalion and once more behold her Master?

Not yet. A voice within her spoke answer. The end was near, but deeper depths of pain and renunciation must yet be touched ere the drop-curtain might fall on that tragedy of the Ages.

How strange and impossible, and yet on this fantastic reasoning how clear it seemed! Her memory went back to the scenes unfolded to her in her visions of the night. All was definite up to the point at which she had fainted in the amphitheatre. Then had fallen the blank of unconsciousness. From that point her mind seemed to have carried down but a vague impression of ineffable experience, of an Influence sublime beyond all words, a nebulous but haunting recollection of counsel, warning, yearning desire to help, and of the final shedding of a Blessing and a Peace, like unto that Blessing and that Peace which the Master of old gave unto His disciples.

Dorothea rose, and, drawing up the blind of her window, stood for some minutes drinking in the morning freshness and looking out upon the river, more mystic than it had ever seemed before, as it lay faintly irradiated by a pale reflection from the east.

Bruised, broken, with the presentiment upon her of further woe, Dorothea was nevertheless upheld by a new-born fortitude. Clear-eyed, courageous, she waited for that which should come in this wondrous calm brought back from the hither-world.

She went up to her bedroom, passing her son's door, which was open; and by this she knew, as by the absence of Matsu, who, when his master was here, slept on a pile of futons in the corridor, that Alaric had probably passed the night in his own house. Dorothea wondered what he

had been doing—if by chance he had got an invitation for the Duchess of Chaunterell's ball ; whether he had met Kaia ; and whether he yet knew his doom. The mother's heart yearned to her only son, who, like herself, was bereft. She longed to hold him in her arms, where, forgetting his manhood, he might weep out his sorrow upon her bosom. But Alaric was a man, and Dorothea was woman as well as mother—a woman with her own incommunicable experience creating a well-nigh impassable barrier between them. She had of late, in a curious occult way, realized this fact.

She undressed and went to bed, first locking her door. Afterwards she regretted having guarded herself against being called as usual, for it was nearly noon when she awoke from the deep sleep into which she had fallen. Thus it was almost luncheon-time, and she had barely finished dressing, when the maid came to tell her that Lord Ravage was below. It came then upon Dorothea with a shock that Sebastian Blythe would long ere this have gone about his day's business, and that the note she had meant to send him the first thing in the morning would probably not now find him at his chambers. She at once, however, dashed off a few lines, carefully worded, in which she asked him to bring her back the document of which they had spoken the previous afternoon, and absolutely withdrew from any co-operation with him in the use to which he had suggested putting the letters. She despatched this note by messenger, and then went down to meet Lord Ravage.

* * * * *

At twelve o'clock Alaric was mounting the steps of the big mansion in Mayfair which the Aldennings had bought from Lady Tregellis' relative, just at the time when

Dorothea's eyes opened from that heavy sleep into which she had fallen after her night's experience between two worlds.

At that hour, too, Kaia Aldenning was waiting and dreaming. She waited for Alaric; she dreamed of Sarel. It was a blissful dream. She was recalling the half-hour she had spent alone with Sarel in this room after their return from P. O. L.'s dinner at the House of Commons on the previous evening. She was repeating to herself certain words Sarel had spoken which had seemed to her the heaven-vouchsafed answer to her own holiest and most secretly-cherished fancies. She had not expected that any ordinary London man would understand those fancies, would share with her the creed her mother had taught her of the union of two souls from all time, consecrate and virgin to each other. A foolish ideal, and she had been right in thinking it scarcely possible of fulfilment in the world of men she had lately entered. This was what her father had said when she had hinted at her cherished belief on some occasion when he had laid before her, as seemed to him his duty, the advantages, from a worldly point of view, of various highly-placed suitors. He had argued on the mundane side, as also seemed to him his duty. But when Kaia listened and shook her head, and spoke haltingly of that primitive but wholly spiritual religion of love inculcated by her savage-born mother, Horace Aldenning had nothing to say. Her belief might be Arruan superstition, but who was he to gain-say it—he who had loved and won and been faithful to his Arruan bride? Who was he that he should dispute Kaia's expounding of the Will of the Great Creator of pairs? How should he deny his dead wife's faith in the existence of that other wandering spirit, the *wunda* in native phrase, twin to Kaia's own, whom the messenger-voices would in due time reveal to her, and for whom she

must wait, holding herself pure and free, believing, hoping, praying that the twin soul might also keep itself pure and free?

And had not Sarel's own spontaneous declaration convinced the girl of this fidelity? Those words he had uttered a few hours ago on this spot, as he had knelt at her feet, her hand to his lips, his voice, manner, attitude reverential, as if he had been a worshipper at the shrine of a divinity, were to Kaia the justification of her mother's creed. Great One, as to herself she called him, Chief among his people, admired and sought by all women, he had by his own passionate assurance held himself faithful to his undiscovered ideal.

In the meeting of their eyes as she had sung the song of her mother's land, that ideal personified had been revealed to him. On the beach at Kilburra their hearts had declared themselves, and he had known her for 'the wife of his soul'—so he had last night named her—for his mate sent from heaven, his companion star, seen distant in space, brought by force of his yearning to blend its light with his own. Thus Sarel, by repute so austere of protestation, so impassive in demeanour, so unemotional in his words and ways, had shown himself eloquent to the girl he loved.

She had then recalled to him their talk by the seashore at Kilburra, and had playfully asked him why the world called him cold, hard, unpoetic, a woman-hater, a mere ambitious politician, impervious to all softer influences. Then he had replied that he had seemed a woman-hater because all womanhood must merge itself in the one adored woman before he could bow to its sway; a mere ambitious politician because till now, political ambition had appeared to him the worthiest object in life; cold, hard, unpoetic, because his hardness had been the crust of volcanic fires, and because to him poetry meant the un-

discovered love, and only to one responsive note would the poetic chords within him vibrate.

So, then, Kaia had told herself triumphantly, he was true, his heart was pure, he had been faithful. Herein lay his irresistible claim, herein the mysterious affinity which had been proven by the thrilling of his nature to hers at her greeting, 'Niyà ninda kà-āia—kà-āia.'

This was the dream from which Alaric awakened Kaia.

THE FIFTH ACT

THE GATE OF LOVE

SCENES

IN THE WAKING LIFE

THE butler led Alaric through a long suite of reception-rooms to a sunny boudoir looking out on a terrace and courtyard, in which were set palms and flowering plants. As the man opened the door of Kaia's sitting-room, Alaric checked the announcement on his lips, and signed to him that he would enter alone. So intimate was he with the Aldennings that there was nothing odd in this unconventionality. Besides, the butler had more than an inkling of the position of affairs, and read Alaric's heart pretty correctly. Being a person of artistic taste, and having seen the newspapers that morning, he felt admiration and sympathy for the young hero of the hour, and was glad to humour his whim. So he withdrew silently, and Alaric was free to gaze for a few moments unobserved upon the lady of his love.

The room in which he stood seemed to him very bright and girl-like, with its flowered chintz, its Sheraton furniture blending incongruously with some rococo things Kaia had picked up in Paris, and various spears, boomerangs and native trophies she had brought from the Pass. The scent from bowls of primroses and narcissus spread about was like the intoxication of her own presence. The windows were open and let in more odours of spring bulbs,

but a pile of logs blazed in the fireplace, for Sebastian Blythe's east wind was keen enough to nip a tropic flower like Kaia.

Her back was to him as she sat absorbed in her day-dream in a deep armchair before the fire, and he closed the door and moved softly a step or two sideways before he could get a full view of her. She was dressed in white woollen stuff with sable at the throat and wrists; her head was thrown back, showing the slim column of her throat, with its faint brownish tinge, and the lovely curve of her chin and cheek. Her lashes drooped, and there was something of lassitude in her air, for she was tired after dancing much the night before. One arm partly cushioned her head; a tender smile was upon her lips, which were red and velvety and pure, as might be some new-opened exotic blossom. The dreamy smile, the attitude, the expression, reminded Alaric irresistibly of a statue he had worshipped in his student days—the Ariadne of the Vatican.

Just so in those early days in Naxos might Ariadne have dreamed of Theseus, believing herself to be and to have been her king's only love.

Alaric came to the girl's side, and without formal greeting stood by her. She turned upon him with a start and a brightening glance, her rapt look changing to one of welcome.

'I was thinking you were rather late, Ral,' she said, and put out her hand.

He bent and kissed it.

Kaia seemed a little embarrassed, and blushed, then paled; and as she withdrew her hand she looked down for a moment, but presently lifted her eyes straight to his with, he fancied, something of rebuke in their gaze.

'That's my un-English way,' he said. 'I meant it as a tribute of admiration. I couldn't help being demonstra-

tive, Kaia, you looked so beautiful. I wish I could paint you just in that position. Do you know what you made me think of?

‘What?’ she asked.

‘Ariadne dreaming of her lover. You know, the statue in the Vatican; everybody knows it.’

‘I don’t know many statues. I don’t think I have seen that one. . . . But . . . Ariadne was deserted, wasn’t she?’

‘Yes. She was deceived by a false lover, and afterwards the true one came and consoled her. You are not like Ariadne in that sort of way, Kaia. No one who had once been loved by you could ever wish to leave you.’

‘Of course that would be impossible,’ she answered seriously. ‘He would not be my true love if he had ever loved or could ever love another woman; if he were not my true love, how could I love him?’

‘Should you know your true love, Kaia, when Fate threw him in your path?’

‘I know that I should,’ she said in a very low voice.

‘Kaia, tell me, were you thinking of your true love last night . . . as you looked out of the brougham window while you were waiting at the gate of Chaunterell House?’

She seemed surprised.

‘How did you know that, Alaric?’

‘You *were* thinking, then—of your true love?’ he whispered ardently.

‘Yes,’ she answered; and her face looked again as it had looked then, and she did not seem shy or angry. ‘But I don’t know,’ she added, ‘how you can possibly tell that.’

‘Because I was watching you. I waited among the crowd at the gate, hoping that I might get a glimpse of you. . . . And I was rewarded.’

'Oh, Alaric, that was stupid; and if you had tried in time, you might so easily have had an invitation; then you might have danced with me. I told you so at your Show yesterday. You have neglected your opportunities this season, and that doesn't seem like you. Lady Tregellis would have got you an invitation from the duchess if you had asked her.'

'I dare say she would. But I haven't been thinking of duchesses, and opportunities, and things. I have been thinking only of the Work, and of you.'

'Well,' said Kaia sweetly, 'it has shown itself worth thinking of, hasn't it?—I mean the Work—that is, judging by what the papers say about you this morning. Oh, *bujeree* you—*bujeree* you!' she cried, relapsing into dialect, her face beaming with pleasure. 'Ral, do you know that I haven't said a blacks' word for ever so long?'

'Why is that, Kaia?'

'They don't come naturally as they used. Oh, I can't tell you why. People are so silly, and make me sing and act my blacks' songs, so that I feel only half-real when I am like my old self. But I'm real and in very great earnest now, Ral, and I'm saying "*bujeree* you!" with my whole heart.'

She stood up and made one of her pretty native salutations—not that particular obeisance which accompanied the form of homage to her Chief, '*Urumbūla Mahmi*,' but a graceful extending of her arms and drawing of her hands inward, the finger-tips meeting upon her breast, while she tossed back her crown of dark hair, the auburn streaks upon it shining in the sunlight. So free and joyous was the gesture, and the light on her hair and in her eyes so dazzling, that Alaric cried:

'How happy you seem, Kaia!'

'Yes, Ral,' she answered simply, 'I am happy; and I am glad.'

‘Doesn’t one thing mean the other?’

‘Not quite. I’m happy in myself—because—because——’ She faltered and blushed. ‘Never mind . . . I’m glad, Ral, because of your success.’

‘And I’m glad and happy, too. I’m glad because you are glad, and I am happy because—I must say it, Kaia—because I love you.’

A shadow of uneasiness dimmed the girl’s joy.

‘You should be more glad, dear friend, for having proved to the world that you are a great artist.’

‘The two things are one. Love makes success, and success counts for nothing without love. Kaia,’ he went on impetuously, ‘once I thought success everything; now it seems only worth striving for if it makes you—if I could feel that because of it I was dearer to you.’

Kaia sat down again, and did not answer just at once. The man stood with his hand on the back of her chair, trembling with hope and anxiety. It was the first time that a doubt had assailed him. Kaia’s eyes were downcast, but by-and-by she looked up at him bravely.

‘You didn’t need success to make you dear to me. We settled all that at Kilburra long ago; don’t you remember?’

‘I told you at Kilburra, Kaia, that I loved you.’

‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘but we had different ideas about love then.’

‘It was not that we had different ideas about love, so much as that you did not know then what love meant; but you do understand now, Kaia . . . you have confessed that to me.’

‘Yes,’ she said very low, a rosy glow overspreading her face. ‘I ought not to be ashamed to confess it. I do understand now.’

The young man, emboldened, leaned closer over her chair.

'You understand now?' he repeated. 'And I may speak. . . . I waited until you should know in your own self the meaning of love. . . . And I waited, too, until I had a better right to speak—until I had made myself more nearly your equal. Of course, people will say that I haven't earned the right; that it's sheer presumption in me to approach you—you who are so beautiful and so rich, while I have nothing—nothing in the worldly sense—to recommend me. I've neither money nor rank—nothing but just my art; nothing but the inspiration you yourself gave me, and which I bring back to you moulded into form——'

'Alaric,' she interrupted, alarm in her voice, 'you mustn't put things like that—indeed you must not. I haven't given you your inspiration; you had it long before you met me. Why, when we first came to England, people were saying that you were certain to make a name. And as for money and all that, Alaric, you know there never could be any question of equality between art and——'

'And love,' he cried, catching the word from her lips, and substituting for it another which she had not intended. 'You were going to say, Kaia, "between art and money." And that's true; there never could be any question. Money is a poor sordid thing which you and I won't think of now. . . . I oughtn't to have touched upon it; but art and love are one.'

'I don't know,' she said, speaking again with that sweet seriousness which seemed new to her in relation to worldly matters. 'It seems to me that is one of the fine things people say, which, after all, don't mean a great deal. Art and love are not always one. And money is certainly a poor sordid thing if you think of it by itself, and the desire of it is base. Yet it is a great power in its way, and I have been told that the steps to a ruler's throne are

best paved with gold. Do you think that money would really be so mean a thing if it were used for great purposes: for making smooth the upward path of one who was very dear—one who needed to be rich in order to achieve the highest ends? I would not despise and make light of my money, Alaric, if I could put it to such uses.'

In his overconfidence, perhaps his self-conceit—for Alaric was not modest—the young man still misunderstood her meaning.

'Oh, Kaia, all that you say comes from your own sweet, beautiful nature; and yet I feel that the man who truly loved you would not be glad that you were rich. He would rather, I think, have you as I painted you—as your mother was—an Arruan girl with no wealth but your necklace of South Sea pearls and your tapa robe—the dress of a chief's daughter—and the garland of hibiscus blossoms with which I girdled you.'

Kaia laughed, jesting to herself in her alarm.

'You talk as though you were a poet, Ral, and not a painter. The pearls and the hibiscus flowers sound very pretty—you'll find some nice writing about them in the notices of "The Invocation"—and you know everybody yesterday was saying how wonderfully you had painted the tapa. But for the robe—well, a South Sea Island Princess might wear it effectively as a presentation train; but I'm afraid it would be laughed at on ordinary occasions. And, then, I've no desire to be an Arruan girl like my mother, or even to go back to the Pass. Not now. My lot is cast here in England. My star has travelled over the Great Water, as my mother said; and my Chief——' She lifted her head proudly. 'You remember it was prophesied that I should win the love of a Chief among white people—one who should be a ruler of men?'

Alaric laughed, too; but the laugh had a nervous ring.

'Now, what am I to say to that prophesy, Kaia? I'm not going to let it daunt me; and, though you may think it dreadful presumption, mightn't I suggest that an artist may be in his own way a ruler among men?—a ruler, you see, in some subtle, inward sense. For you'll admit that it's the great singers, the great actors, and the great painters who have helped most—even more than the politicians and the soldiers—in building up nations.'

'I dare say you are right, Alaric. I am afraid that I don't know much about the history of nations. But I wasn't meaning that kind of thing when I said that you must not think of me as having given you inspiration.'

'And why must I not think that of you, Kaia?' Alaric cried passionately. 'Why may I not say what is as true as that I live? You *are* my inspiration; you are more—you are the one woman in the world who could lift me to real greatness. That's because you are the one woman I could worship with all my heart and all my imagination and all my spirit. . . . No, no, Kaia; let me make you understand. . . . It is for this that I have worked and waited. Do you not remember what I told you at Kilburra? Well, have I not painted you as the Real and the Ideal blended in one? Have I not proved to you that I have no true inspiration except what you have put into me? You saw yesterday the impression my picture of you made, and you'll know better what it is worth when the public has its say. It's the verdict of the Great Big Stupid that I care about, not the opinion of the critics. But—well, you've read this morning what the critics think. Don't think me a mere self-conceited fool for saying that I've wakened up to-day to find myself famous. It isn't self-conceit; I know that it's going to be true. And I feel a sort of sacred responsibility about

the Work and the success. I have always had that feeling, and till I knew you it was the best kind of religion I had. I feel that this is not going to be just the fame and the fashion of a season, but something that shall endure. And it's *you* who have made me famous, Kaia. The soul that they've discovered in "The Invocation," and which they said had always been wanting in my work, is your soul—the part of yourself that has inspired my art, and which has changed and enlightened and lifted me. You have made me more worthy of you—better justified in asking you to be my wife.'

Kaia stretched out her hands as if beseeching him to desist.

'Oh, not that, Alaric—your sister, if you will. But your wife—oh no! you mustn't say it—you mustn't think it—for it's impossible.'

'Why impossible? It would not seem so to you if . . . if you'd let me come near to you . . . if I could bring home to you the strength and depth and reverence of a man's love for the woman he would have for his wife. Oh, Kaia'—Alaric bent close, his lips brushing her hair—'do you remember . . . that day at Kilburra I asked you to let me kiss you . . . and you would not—then? But now, Kaia, dearest Kaia . . . now?'

Alaric's voice sank to a whisper. He laid his lips upon her hair as though he were kissing something holy. He could not tell whether she was conscious of the kiss. She moved in her chair, turning so as to withdraw herself, but not hastily or distressfully. She was not angry—of that he felt sure; but her voice was piteous.

'No, Alaric, I could not—less than ever now.'

There was a certain solemnity in her eyes, and Alaric drew back and waited humbly for her to say more.

'You know it isn't true what you have always thought of me,' she went on. 'I did understand the real meaning

of love, even at Kilburra, though I wasn't sure then that I understood. I know now. The knowledge has been there since the old days on the Pass, when M^a-ma taught me——'

'How to make fools of men,' he interrupted bitterly.

'We were speaking of love,' she said, drawing back with simple dignity. 'I told you, in a stupid way, over in Kilburra—you will have forgotten. Though I did not understand myself, yet I understood love; and there was no need for me to say to you, "*Pialla naia nanti*," for all the time the answer was in my heart. The love I mean has only one name, and if you had ever known that, you could not mistake one kind for another. M^a-ma taught me that the true love is a sacred bond between the spirits of one man and one woman, and only those two in all the world, because God created them of the same elements in the Beginning. And then, Alaric, you see, it is the fate of those two which decides through how many lives and how many ages they must wander and seek and wait till each finds its own. But, once found, there could never be any mistake or doubt. And as each soul keeps itself pure and faithful, so will it the more readily recognise its mate, and the two will become one. Oh, Alaric! that was the great happiness I spoke to you of yesterday; that is the joy that has come to me. All through his life my Chief has waited for me; he has been faithful, and now at last he knows me, and claims me for his wife.'

Alaric gave a hard indrawn ejaculation.

'So you've never cared for me. It was of him you were thinking last night. You've never cared for me—not for one minute!'

Kaia was deeply distressed.

'Alaric, forgive me—oh, do forgive me! I did care for you. I do care for you. It is as if you belonged to me in some way—as P^a-pa belongs, only differently. I wanted

you for my brother, Ral. I've never thought of your turning from me. It would kill me if you were to hate me. Nothing would make up for that—any more than if Pà-pa were to turn against me and hate me. Oh! can't you understand, Ral? I didn't mean to hurt you. I always hoped that you understood. I made myself believe so, and that the Work was worth so much to you that you wouldn't mind, and that we would always be close and dear to each other. . . . And, Ral . . . if I misled you that time at Kilburra, you must remember how short a time I had been living among people of the world, and everything seemed strange and out of proportion. Try, Ral, to think leniently of me, and to believe what is true; that I'd gladly take the pain myself, if that way I could save you from it. Don't be hard on me. . . . And though deep down in myself I knew him always for my Chief, how could I dream then that one so great and grand would stoop to me?

'Stoop to you!—my—— Stop, Kaia; you don't know what you are saying.'

Alaric made no other answer for a minute or two. He seemed untouched by Kaia's tender appeal, and all the light had gone from his face.

'I did not mean to hurt you,' Kaia reiterated. 'I thought you understood.'

Alaric walked deliberately away from her to the fireplace, and stood there heavy, dogged, dazed-looking.

'It's true, then, what Eustace Olver was telling people yesterday?' he said.

'Yesterday?' she repeated vaguely.

'At my Show — that you are engaged to Gavan Sarel?'

'Yes, it's true. But I don't know why Mr. Olver should have said so. No one but Pà-pa had been told yet. I wanted you to hear it first from me.'

'That was considerate!' he broke out savagely, and checked himself at sight of her shocked and pained face. 'It doesn't matter,' he said more gently. 'Whether the news comes from your lips or from Eustace Olver's, it takes the hope out of my life.'

Kaia's eyes filled with tears, and her mouth quivered like that of a child who has been struck. There was silence for a few moments; then Alaric burst forth with renewed bitterness.

'Do you know what sort of a man you are giving yourself to and believing in as if he were a god? Of course he loves you—who could help doing that? But do you imagine that if you weren't a stepping-stone for his ambition he'd have let himself love you? I tell you that love is as nothing in Sarel's life. He has never cared for any woman——'

Alaric was maddened still more by the gleam in Kaia's eyes.

'Ah, that's just it! that's just it!' she cried. 'He has kept himself for me.'

'Because you are the first woman he has known who can give him exactly what his ambition needs. Sarel is not made of flesh and blood, but of stone and iron. His god is power; he is incapable of love.'

'You think so,' she said, with a little crooning note of triumph in her voice. 'But you don't know him—you don't know him!'

'No,' said Alaric, 'I don't know him; and if I did it would make no difference. And nothing makes any difference, either, in my feeling for you. You are my inspiration just the same, and you always will be; and till you are actually Sarel's wife I shall never give up the hope of winning you. I shall not give it up then, for the day will come when he will fail you, and then it will be my turn to prove to you what a man's love is worth. . . . Now

I'd better go. I don't want to make a worse fool of myself than I've done already, and I don't want to give you any more pain. You are crying, Kaia. Don't! There's no good in it.'

Alaric's own voice was choked. He made a movement towards her, but restrained himself, and walked to the window, where he stood looking out on the courtyard and the stiff plants in their stone vases. He was trying to pull himself together, trying to realize how the world would seem to him with Kaia in it, no longer a girl to love and to be won, but the wife of Sarel; trying to meet his disappointment manfully; for though he had declared that he would never give up hope of winning Kaia, he knew how vain the hope must be. . . .

Well, there was always the Work. . . . And there was Doda. *She* would understand and not despise him. To her, and her alone, could he go for comfort and support. She would talk no sentimental nonsense about heaven-ordained mates, but would rouse him to a robust dealing with life's chances, as she herself had done, and in her appreciation of the tragi-comedy of existence would teach him how to get artistic value out of his heart-break. She, too, he felt certain, had made such capital from her sufferings, and he felt intuitively that those sufferings had not been light. Of sufferings of that kind a mother would not, he told himself, speak to her son. And yet he wondered, good comrades as they had been, that she had not done so. For Doda was artist even more than mother. Therein had lain the chief part of her influence over him; also in her profound common-sense, her embracing strength, her deep understanding of realities.

Alaric could not have told why such thoughts of his mother came to him at this moment, but they filled and sustained him; and all through his bitterness and his humiliation and his pain she seemed in his fancy to be

standing forth with sympathetic arms extended, an image of tender grace and dignity, to which of late, the thought struck him, he had given less than due worship. True, if the ideal love had been snatched from him, there yet remained the ideal mother.

Kaia watched him as he stood at the window furthest from her, his profile dark against the light, but set and miserable. Her own heart was full of pity and compunction, and she longed to go and put her hand upon his arm and beg him once more to be content with the sisterly affection for which she had pleaded so earnestly. In a strange, incongruous way Kaia felt that never till now had she realized how closely Alaric was bound to her. She had risen from her chair and was moving towards him with this impulse, when the door opened and a servant came in with a letter, which he handed to her. It had been brought, the man explained, by special messenger, with orders to wait and take back the assurance of its safe delivery into Miss Aldenning's own hands. The letter was marked 'Private and important.' Kaia signed unthinkingly the form of receipt put before her. Alaric turned as the door closed again. She was looking at the letter with a puzzled, doubtful expression and a prophetic sense of evil tidings.

'I had better go,' he said harshly. 'I'm in your way; and there doesn't seem anything more to talk about.'

'Oh, Alaric, there's a great deal more to talk about. I can't bear you to leave me like this. What were you thinking of as you stood there? It was something very dreadful, and to watch you made my heart ache.'

'No, it was not dreadful,' he answered simply. 'I was thinking of my mother—thinking that, after all, Fate hasn't been so unkind, for, anyhow, I have been given two perfect women to hold sacred—you and Doda.'

Kaia wept unrestrainedly. Alaric's manhood went out in an impulse of tenderness.

'No, dear, don't cry; it can't be helped. You mustn't worry over me. After all, there couldn't come much harm to a fellow when he has a mother whom he can reverence, and when, even though the woman he loves is not for him—at least, when that seems so: for I can't—no, in spite of all you say, Kaia, about destiny and love and being created in pairs from the beginning—I can't believe it's all over between you and me, and I feel somehow inside me that we shall come together at the last—well, a man isn't so badly off when, in spite of all that, he can reverence the girl he loves. That's how it is. And I was thinking just then that Doda would understand; and I was thinking, too, that she would be disappointed. Now, don't—don't cry, Kaia! That's the second time to-day that you have shed tears for me; and I can't kiss them away . . . I can't . . . do . . . anything,' and Alaric's voice broke in a sob. 'Read your letter,' he said presently, nerving himself anew. 'Don't bother about me.'

Kaia looked at the letter again, and tried to check her emotion, laughing nervously.

'I love you, Ral—I love you for the way you take things—only—it isn't the same as what I feel for him. I can't quite understand myself, Ral—I only know that I couldn't bear to part with you—and it will all come right some day, and you will understand.'

'Yes,' he answered, putting force upon himself, 'I shall understand . . . some day. . . . It . . . it's hard just for the moment . . . that's all. . . . Don't think about that any more, dear. . . . Read your letter.'

Kaia laughed again half hysterically.

'I'm half afraid to open it. . . . It's something very special. . . . It had to be given into my own hands. It's marked "important."'

'So are most begging circulars,' said he, laughing, too, in a queer, quavering way. 'Look at it, and you'll probably find a lithographed request for a small loan.'

With badly-affected indifference Alaric took up an illustrated paper, on which he saw only a dazzling effect of meaningless blotches and outlines.

Kaia sat down again in the armchair by the fireplace, and opened the letter which had been brought to her. It was a somewhat bulky packet, for it contained enclosures in a separate cover besides the document which she read first, and that was unsigned.

Kaia had never in her life received an anonymous letter, but she could not have had much difficulty in grasping the meaning of this one; its substance was sufficiently plain.

* * * *

The document fell from Kaia's nerveless fingers and fluttered to the hearthrug. She had read it first in an eager, frightened manner, hardly taking in its full meaning; then a second time more comprehendingly. She sat for two or three minutes speechless, dazed. The letter lay on the ground. The draught from the fireplace caught it, stirred its edges, and made the leaves open and rear themselves slightly, almost, Kaia thought, as if the thing were mocking her. She stared blankly at the sheets. At that distance, she could not read the words which made wavy black lines upon the white paper. And yet she seemed to know every one which the letter contained. The whole substance of it was printed on her brain.

She remembered presently the enclosures. These, her correspondent said, were the proofs of his statements. They were lying in their envelope upon her lap. Yes, she would read them and judge for herself.

There were two or three letters doubled in the envelope,

none of them long, for in all the outer leaf was blank. The writing of the first one she looked at was known to her—a delicate pointed hand, of peculiar character and distinction.

She had received one or two notes in that handwriting, and the monogram, too, was familiar—a curiously interlaced ‘D. Q.’ in the left-hand corner of the sheet opposite the address—Chelsea Embankment. There was no doubt as to the paper. At a glance she would have said that the letter had been written by Dorothea Queste.

Had it ever been sent to its destination? There were evidences to the contrary. The creases in the middle looked recent, and it exactly fitted the envelope from which she had taken it—a fresh one, bearing no postmark, and written on in a different hand. Besides this, the letter bore no appearance of having been carried about in a pocket, of having lain tenderly upon a man’s person, as such a letter might well have been carried by the beloved person to whom it had been written. Perhaps the words of love in it were too ardent. Perhaps at the last moment caution had suggested cooler phrases; or, maybe, the assignation had been foreseen as impracticable before the letter could be posted, and so it had been rendered useless. Why, then, had it not been destroyed? Possibly Dorothea had been called away in haste, or had thrust it unaddressed into a drawer or blotting-book, pending arrangement of plans, and had thus given opportunity to the thief. These conjectures flashed through Kaia’s mind with a startling coherence. She observed that the letter bore date of the previous year. It had allusions in it to a meeting—a week-end passed by the lovers in an obscure Breton village, which turned the girl cold and sick. But she made no sound. There were two other letters—these in a different handwriting and on different paper—the thick notepaper of the House of Commons, with its

embossed heading. Her father had often written to her on that paper, and only this morning she had received Gavan Sarel's first love-letter on the same kind of sheet, sent from his room in the House. There was no doubt about that paper, either, and she could not feel any doubt as to the handwriting.

Then she told herself that such a thing as forgery was common enough. She remembered how a letter had been produced from another famous leader, and had been proved a forgery. Not so very long ago P. O. L., in talking to her of his former chief, had mentioned the episode, and had described the scene in the House of Commons after the forgery had been proved. That letter, too, had been written, ostensibly, from Westminster. What so simple as to steal the House of Commons stationery? But Sarel's writing would not be easy to imitate. It was as peculiar in its way as that of Dorothea Queste. And, besides, Kaia had read a sentence in it which to her seemed indubitable proof that the letter had not been forged.

She had not at once fallen upon this sentence. The letter she read first was a mere hasty note, precise in its brevity, telling its own tale of longing in those three words—'My love—to-night.' But the other letter was much longer—the outpouring of a reserved man, who, when he lets himself go, knows no limitations. It was of that very letter that Sebastian Blythe had contemptuously remarked: 'What fools men of action are when they take up the pen!'

On its showing, the lovers had been parted for some weeks. There had been a crisis in the Progressivist party, and Sarel had stood alone, fighting under severe mental strain, and in one of those grim moods which had made him a terror to his followers, but in which, on the other hand, the emotional part of him craved freest outlet—

when indeed the love of woman seemed an absolute necessity for the preservation of his mental balance. In such a mood had he written to Dorothea, imploring her to return to him, to meet him in one of their secret haunts, praying for the solace of those hours of companionship to which he made touching allusion. And here had occurred one of the oversights that men make—even men who love much. They make such sometimes out of forgetfulness, sometimes from paucity of language in which to clothe their affection, perhaps from a lack of subtlety not so noticeable in women. Women do not often commit such blunders. This was a horrible blunder; one tragi-comic; a thing to bring cynical laughter while at the same time the heart shed tears of blood. In both letters—this one written by Sarel a year ago to Dorothea Queste, and in the one written last night to herself—a certain love-phrase occurred. He had used it alike to both.

It was a curious turn of words not in common use, a phrase of quaint Elizabethan directness. Kaia had understood it and had loved it, and had kissed those lines before placing the letter in its sacred hiding-place—where now it lay—upon her bosom. But to know that this love-phrase was not hers, that it had been inspired by another woman, kissed, it might be, by her also, used by him as part of the stock-in-trade of endearments common to them both—that was hard, that was horrible. Till now, Kaia had endured her pain with savage stoicism, had received each stab without flinching, and had not let a sound escape her while the agony of doubt was becoming slow certainty. This was more than she could bear. A muffled cry broke from her lips, exceeding bitter, and stirring deep the heart of Alaric, who heard it. He threw away the screening paper and hurried to Kaia's side.

She had fallen back in her chair, as though stricken by

sudden illness, her face drawn and of a deathly pallor, her eyes strained wide in mute anguish, that seemed to beseech his pity; and perhaps nothing could have more clearly shown how near akin in sympathy were their souls than her dumb appeal and his ready response.

'Kaia, dear Kaia, what is it?' he cried, his own jealous pain quite forgotten for the moment in her need. 'Kaia, what has happened? What have they done to you, my dear, that has hurt you so?'

She could not speak, but her eyelids fluttered downward, and her hand feebly pointed to the letters lying scattered on the ground. His own eyes were immediately arrested by the sight of his mother's handwriting, and he picked up that letter and eagerly scanned it.

'Oh, not that!' she said in a faint murmur, yet too weak to protest.

He silenced her determinedly.

'No matter. Whatever it is, I should know the truth. There is some abominable wickedness on foot. . . . Doda! . . . My mother! . . . No! It's inconceivable! it's impossible!'

Kaia made a movement forward, but her body would not answer to her will, and she tried in vain to stop him. Even to her bewildered mind, racked with its own woe, the horror of the situation presented itself—the horror that a son should read, written by his mother's own hand, the secret of that mother's dishonour.

The girl wanted to speak, but she could not; her lips would not move, her tongue would not articulate; and Alaric was too absorbed in the revelation thrust upon him to pay heed even to Kaia. A strangling pain tore the girl's chest, a sense of suffocation overpowered her, and presently she knew no more.

Alaric did not see that she was unconscious. The universe contained nothing for him at that moment but

the awful knowledge that Doda, his mother, his ideal incarnate of matronly virtue, was something other than he had believed her. The hideous fact was clear enough, yet he could not realize it, because of its hideousness.

‘It’s impossible!’ he muttered to himself again. ‘It *can’t* be true!’

But it was true, and he knew that it was true. The same intuitive certainty which had overwhelmed Kaia possessed him in turn. He was convinced that the letter he held in his hand had been written by his mother to her lover.

And—most horrible thought—Sarel had not only been the lover of his mother: he was also the affianced husband of Kaia. This evil man had robbed him both of the mother he had revered and of the girl who he told himself would have been his wife.

In his blind rage Alaric crushed the letter in his hand. He would have torn it into a thousand pieces and cast them into the fire, but he remembered that in it he might hold the proof of guilt. It was his duty, he felt, his right, to sift and disprove or corroborate the allegation. He must confront his mother with that letter in his hand and challenge her to deny the truth of it. That was the idea uppermost in his mind.

His wrath seemed almost rather that of a betrayed husband than of an outraged son. He gathered up the other letters, still not looking at Kaia, thinking of nothing but the necessity that he should know everything there was to be known.

When he had read all the documents, including the anonymous communication, his mind was clear, and he felt that the chain of evidence was established. He could himself supply certain links, and, reminded by an allusion in the letter, went back in a fury of regret to a date mentioned, that of his return from the East, and of Sarel’s

midnight visit to his mother's studio. Oh that he had then unmasked that mysterious figure which he had almost certainly seen come out by the models' door! He remembered the inner door of the studio being locked, and his mother's delay, and her agitation when she had opened it. He remembered the man's glove he had found on the hearthrug.

It is not too much to say that Alaric was driven nearly mad by the double jealousy and the double bereavement. It did not strike him that from Sarel's infidelity he might reap personal joy. He could not weigh chances and atoning advantages to himself from the loss of that which in this moment of revulsion seemed dearer to him almost than Kaia herself—his faith in his mother. If that were indeed lost, then he was done with her for ever; and his chief thought now was that he would go to her with his proofs, arraign and renounce her. If she were guilty of this thing, then henceforth she could be no mother to him. The determination braced him. He put the letters together in his hand. There was a stricken look upon his face.

'Kaia,' he said, and his own voice sounded strange to him, 'these are my business; you did well to let me read them.'

Now he saw that Kaia lay back speechless and to all appearance dead. He kneeled by her in an agony of alarm.

'Have they killed you?' he cried. 'Oh, my dear Innocent! my beautiful one! . . . Look at me, Kaia! Let me know that you are not dead!'

But she did not move nor open her eyes. He felt her pulse and listened to her heart, and tried uselessly to revive her with a bottle of smelling-salts and with water that he poured from one of the vases of flowers. Then, terribly frightened, he flew to the bell and kept his hand on the electric button, while at the same time the door

opened, and Mr. Aldenning, all unconscious of disaster, came in.

‘Isn’t it luncheon-time?’ he began cheerily, and halted, his face changing at the sight of Alaric and of his daughter’s prostrate form. ‘What has happened?’ he exclaimed, darting to her side. ‘What does this mean? . . . Kaia! . . . Girlie!’ and, finding no response to his frenzied appeal, he turned fiercely to the butler, who now appeared in answer to Alaric’s summons. ‘Send for a doctor at once! . . . Damn you! why do you stand gaping there? Fetch Lloyd Bruce from Grosvenor Street! Go yourself! . . . Bring the nearest doctor! If you can’t get one, find another! . . . Look here!—wait! Some brandy—quick!’

A second servant brought the brandy; the other had departed on his errand. Aldenning forced some drops between his daughter’s lips, and gradually, as he continued to administer the stimulant, Kaia revived. Her eyes opened for a moment or two, but they gazed vacantly, and she did not seem to recognise her father. Aldenning took her in his great arms and laid her upon a couch, loosening her dress with the tenderness of a woman, and feeling the heart-beats. Kaia opened her eyes again, and heaved a deep, shuddering sigh, then softly closed them once more. But the pinched, blue look had left her nostrils and lips, and she was now breathing regularly. Her father, relieved, turned to Alaric.

‘Her mother died of shock, which stopped the action of the heart. It was in a brush with the natives. She saw a spear hit me, and thought I was dead. I’ve always been afraid of any sudden shock for Kaia. Can you tell me what has brought this about?’

Then Aldenning saw that Alaric had suffered a great shock as well. His mouth was twitching and his body shook. He tried to answer, but his voice broke in a sob.

He turned away ashamed, and put his hand over his face. The elder man went up to him and took him kindly by the shoulder.

'Boy,' he said, 'you've had a blow, too. I suppose she has told you that she is going to marry Sarel? But why should that put her into this state? You haven't been upbraiding her, eh? No, I don't believe that it's your fault, or that you've been brute enough to hurt her with reproaches. It's something deeper than that, and I want to know what.'

Alaric made a great effort and conquered himself. The other man liked him for the effort, would have helped him as far as possible. At first he had felt angry with Alaric for having uselessly worried Kaia with his addresses; but Aldenning knew genuine feeling when he saw it, and he had nothing but pity for the boy.

'No, I don't believe you did it,' he said, with conviction. 'Tell me who did.'

'The man she loves,' replied Alaric simply.

Aldenning started.

'What do you mean? He hasn't been here this morning.'

Alaric was silent. His mouth twitched again; a surge of mingled emotions overswept him. Involuntarily he glanced at the bundle of letters in his left hand. Aldenning observed the glance and the papers, and drew his conclusions quickly.

'The man hasn't written to her?' he asked. 'He can't want to break off the engagement; that's impossible.'

Alaric repeated mechanically, and with his former tuneless laugh, 'That's impossible.' He was thinking of his own ejaculation at sight of certain words in his mother's handwriting. That, too, had seemed impossible. Why should anything be impossible?

Aldenning brusquely faced the boy.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘I want the truth. If those letters you’ve got have had anything to do with this attack of Kaia’s, I must know what they’re about, and no nonsensical paltering. I can’t stand bandying words, and my girl lying there. I must be certain of what I’ve got to deal with. Give me those letters. I don’t suppose that you have any better right to them.’

‘I’ve a right to one of them,’ answered Alaric, ‘because it’s written—it’s said to be written—by my mother. She must see it and deny it, or else acknowledge that it’s genuine.’

Aldenning’s eyes gleamed in perplexed inquiry from beneath his red eyebrows.

‘Good. I don’t want to meddle between you and your mother, unless it’s a matter in which my girl is involved, and this looks as if it were. Never mind; I’ll wait for that. You understand. You are right to keep back the letter and take her word before you act upon it. Go straight; never come to a conclusion until you’ve got all your evidence before you. Give me those other letters. If Kaia has read them, they’re as much mine as hers.’

He put out his hand imperiously. Alaric could not have withstood the force of that man’s demand had he wished to do so. But he did not wish to withhold the letters. They were not his property; they had been sent to Kaia. He glanced at the sofa where Kaia lay, but she was not conscious of his glance. Aldenning looked, too, at Kaia. Now she seemed to stir slightly, and her father ran to her and gave her more brandy, assuring himself that all was well. Presently he returned to Alaric, and again held out his hand.

‘Give me those things,’ he repeated, ‘and after that I think you had better go. The doctor ought to be here in a minute. She is over the worst now; you can call some time this evening, and I’ll let you know how she is going on.’

Alaric slowly withdrew his mother's letter from the bundle of papers, and handed those remaining to Aldenning, whose hand closed eagerly upon them. He did not examine them then; it was evident that he wished to do so alone.

'I suppose that you'd have to see them, anyhow,' Alaric said. 'I've no right to them, though I should have liked to take them, and have them proved true or false. You can ask *him*—what—what I'm going to ask my mother. I don't think there's any doubt as to what the answer will be. They're true—they've got the stamp of it; and if you were to put a bullet through his brains, it would be what he deserves. Only remember, sir'—the young man turned as he was going—'my mother's reputation is in your hands.'

Alaric's voice quavered. Again Aldenning's face softened.

'I'll remember; you may trust me. It won't be the first time that I've defended a woman, right or wrong; and it would take a great deal to make me believe your mother wasn't straight.'

The young man made a hesitating step and a movement as though he would have repossessed himself of the documents he had given up. Then a wave of anger braced him anew, and he lifted up his right arm in a passionate gesture.

'By God!' he cried, striking the paper in his other hand, 'if this is her own handwriting—and I'll swear it is—she's not my mother any more.'

The trouble and perplexity grew on Aldenning's brow. He impulsively opened out one of the letters Alaric had given him, and seeing that it was in Sarel's handwriting, while one or two of the words stood forth, his keen mind grasped something of the truth.

A grim, determined look came into his eyes, and his

tongue made a queer clicking sound against his teeth. There was silence for a moment, and each man read the other's thought in his eyes. The red light in Aldenning's darkened.

'Boy, I'm sorry for you; it's a bad business. I must deal with it alone. We've got, each of us, a woman to protect against a bad man. Boy, go to your mother, but be gentle with her; don't take things too hard. Women are only women, after all, though sometimes their sons believe them angels. Remember that she is a woman as well as your mother.'

He wrung Alaric's hand, and the young man, who was looking through a veil of tears, took up his hat and went stumblingly away. Before he passed out of the door his eyes turned back to Kaia as she lay, a white mass, upon the sofa, still only very dimly conscious of what was going on around, her mind still enveloped in a heavy cloud which memory could not pierce. Something had changed the world for her, but she was unable to realize what the catastrophe had been.

Her father kneeled by the sofa, the fatal letters hidden, lest they should rouse distressful recollection. He chafed her hands, and put his face against hers, his great red beard brushing her white dress, while he murmured soothing words in the native language in which he had been accustomed to talk to his dead wife.

'*Minya inta yùgga nunāina—Tàti kagùl* (Be still, my darling; no harm shall come to thee, my little one—my babe). *Kùrridù nūngūndung indà* (Thou art dear to me, my heart).'

And it seemed as though the wild phrases of endearment which had been crooned over her cradle on the shores of the Pass lulled now the pain of Kaia's wounded heart, and gave her a sense of peace.

Alaric could bear no more. The scene, infinitely

pathetic, brought a choking sensation to his throat, and he himself became a child in his helpless yearning for support and sympathy. He closed the door, and went down the corridor and through the empty drawing-rooms into the inner hall with the staggering step of a drunken man. In the vestibule he passed Dr. Lloyd Bruce, ushered by the butler, who inquired anxiously :

'How is Miss Aldenning, sir?'

'I think she is better,' Alaric answered; but Dr. Lloyd Bruce pressed on, not waiting for his reply.

The hall-porter let Alaric out. The sunshine and a gust of east wind driving round the corner made him feel still more dizzy as he stood for a minute looking up and down in bewildered fashion, and scarcely knowing which direction he ought to take. A clock was striking two. He remembered that, had all gone well, he should at this time have been chatting merrily with Kaia and her father over the luncheon-table.

As he stood he could hear the chime of a musical gong in one of the houses near, and the very sound maddened him, making the world seem still more unreal.

He walked blindly on, not discovering till he had gone some distance that he was proceeding northwards instead of towards Chelsea. He did not take a hansom. His mother's letter, still crunched in his hand, stung like something venomous, and the only relief he could get was in bodily movement. Presently he found himself back in Grosvenor Square, and thence by Park Lane and Pimlico reached circuitously the Embankment, upon which his mother's house looked. He remembered their settling there many years back; he remembered the building of the studio. He paused by the river, his back to the Embankment wall, his face to that side-court and the flagged path beneath the trees leading to the models' entrance, and to a door in the wall of a mews beyond. He recalled the night

of his return from the East, and the man in the tilted hat and overcoat drawn to his ears, who had emerged from the shadow of the trees, and, walking with an athlete's stride, had become lost in the gloom of the Embankment.

How private and free from observation was the place, even at this hour of the day! and at dark how simple it would be for anyone from the House of Commons to make his way to the side-door unnoticed, and enter with a latchkey, so that his presence in the house would be absolutely unknown to any of its inmates save the one waiting expectant. In choosing her abode, had Dorothea been actuated by the facilities its situation offered for such meetings?

That it should be Doda—his mother, of whom he had said that to uproot his faith in her would mean the destruction of his faith in all women; that it should be his worshipped Doda who had contrived this evil thing—Doda, who with smiling lips and clear eyes and clever persiflage had deceived her son and deceived her friends—Doda, who postured as the straightest of women, while in reality——

The accusation would not frame itself.

Alaric could not to himself utter the words. His body shook again with the inward sob of his anguish and his shame. He turned away, and, leaning his elbows on the parapet, covered his face with his hands, and then he wept as a schoolboy might not have felt ashamed to weep over his mother's open grave.

But the weakness was but for a minute or two, and was succeeded by a reactionary hardness. The woman who had deceived him could have no mercy now. He pulled himself together for the work that lay before him, crossed the road with the determined step of a man who has nerved himself even to assassination, in what he believes a

righteous cause, and, letting himself in at the front-door, walked straight upstairs to Dorothea's studio.

There was a sound of talk within. He stood hesitating after opening the door behind the tapestry curtain which veiled the entrance. A man was speaking, and he recognised the voice of Lord Ravage.

* * * * *

Lord Ravage lunched with Dorothea, but all through the meal she was constrained and pitifully nervous, and till they were alone together in the studio again nothing but commonplaces passed between them. Ravage was also in a state of nervous tension, and, moreover, he was horrified at the great change he saw in Dorothea. She seemed the ghost of herself, and the heavy black dress she wore heightened her pallor, while in a sort of ghastly mockery it suggested the fact of her husband's death.

He concluded that the shock of this news and the strain of yesterday were now telling upon her, and yet it seemed strange to him that she should feel so keenly an event for which she must have been duly prepared, and which in itself could not be a cause for personal sorrow.

Even when they got to the studio Dorothea seemed inclined to delay the moment for intimate talk. The east wind still blew, and came in through chinks and crannies in the large windows. The room looked cheerless, and she herself nipped and frozen. She put a match to the logs in the fireplace, and as they blazed up, both drew near the grateful warmth.

The sputtering of the logs made her think of the scene with Sebastian Blythe, and she gave a shuddering start. What had come to her that her mind was so dazed? She had forgotten how important it was that he should receive her note of the morning before making any use of the letters he held. She did not seriously think that he

had meant all his melodramatic asseverations. Probably his threats of vengeance had been merely his rather theatrical manner of trying to impress her; in any case it was not likely that he would take any definite step so soon. Nevertheless, she felt deeply uneasy, and, ringing the bell, asked if her messenger had returned. The maid answered that he had not, but a few minutes later re-entered, saying that she was mistaken. The messenger-boy had come back to tell that he had found Mr. Blythe away from his chambers, and had left the letter.

Dorothea sat silent by the fire, her fingers pressed distressfully to her forehead. Lord Ravage came near and laid his hand affectionately upon her other hand.

‘You seem troubled that Blythe did not get your letter. Is it anything that I can do for you instead?’

She roused herself.

‘No, thank you. There is nothing. I don’t think it will matter very much.’

‘Yet I can’t help seeing that there is something weighing heavily on your mind,’ he said. ‘Do let me try to lighten your burden.’

She shook her head. Formerly she would have smiled bravely, and would either have told him the trouble, probably in half-humorous fashion, or would have thrown it lightly aside. It had never been Dorothea’s way to worry her friends with her own mishaps, though she had always sympathy at command for theirs. No doubt that was one of the chief secrets of her popularity. But now a spasm as of tears suppressed crossed her face, and her hand shook helplessly.

‘You strung yourself up a pitch too high yesterday,’ he said, ‘and this is the reaction. It can’t be, dear Thea, that you are grieving deeply for what you must have known was inevitable, and, from your point of view, not greatly to be regretted.’

She was still silent.

Ravage went on, conscious that he was uttering platitudes:

'Naturally, it is sad to think of any man cut off, as he has been, almost in his prime, but by his own act and doing he separated himself from you, and you have no cause to reproach yourself. You were loyal to your husband in the early days and all through his disgrace, and you have held yourself honourably in regard to him ever since. His life could have been of little service to himself or others. His exile in Baziria must have irked him sorely. This is the best thing that could have happened for him, as well as for you.'

Dorothea waved back the gentle pleading as though it jarred unbearably.

'Of course I don't pretend to be grieving deeply over my husband's death.' Then she added with an entire change of manner: 'God keeps him now. May he rest in peace.'

Lord Ravage bowed his head reverently, but he wondered much at Dorothea's words and tone. She, who had always called herself a Pagan, was not given to conventional religious utterances. There was something, too, in her face which he had never seen there before.

'Do you understand,' she said suddenly, 'what it is to be conscious of the spirit's strivings when it is loosed for the first time after being chained for a lifetime?'

He took her words as applying to her own release from the marriage-bond.

'I can understand,' he answered, 'that it is almost dizzying for the moment to find one's self breathing fresh free air outside prison walls. I can understand that the first steps taken in freedom from old trammels must seem strange and a little difficult. Let me lead you, Thea.'

'What are the first steps?' she asked.

He considered for a minute.

‘I was thinking of your son, Alaric. I don’t know how much you have said to him.’

‘Nothing. He has, of course, realized that his father cut himself off from us years ago. I have allowed him to form his own conclusions.’

‘It would be hard and unnecessary to explain more fully now.’

‘Oh, quite unnecessary. Of course, he must know that his father is dead ; but he will not mind that now. His thoughts will be somewhere else—poor Ral !’

Ravage understood that she was referring to Alaric’s disappointment in regard to Kaia, and repeated :

‘Yes, poor Ral ! But he is young, and real success in his career must be a great consoler. He will get over this trouble.’

Again there was a pause. Presently Ravage said :

‘You would wish an announcement made ?’

‘Oh, that—it does not matter.’

He saw that she felt absolutely no concern about her husband’s death, and that he might speak plainly. That was exactly as it should be, he told himself. She was far too true, and too much of a woman of the world, not to look facts in the face.

‘It matters in view of the future, Dorothea. We won’t affect any false sentiment. You and I understand each other. You know my heart.’

‘Indeed I do. There was never one more noble.’

‘The reason why I think there should be no delay in publishing this news is that I should like the second announcement made as soon as may be fitting.’

She looked up at him in a wild way as the prisoner in a dungeon might look up at a sudden ray of light.

‘The second announcement !’

‘Thea,’ he went on, ‘you have known the desire of my

heart all these years back, and you have known that I had too deep a reverence for you to let you be driven on to any dangerous borderland of emotion. But I did speak out not long since when I knew that the barriers between us would soon be removed. I told you then that I wanted you to marry me as soon as you were free. You are free now. I should say, perhaps, conventionally speaking, that you will be free in a few months' time.'

'Free!' she repeated. 'Oh, free—yes, I am free!'

She spoke with a sort of despair in her tone, which made him feel more and more puzzled.

'Thea,' he said, 'we, at any rate, need not be slaves to convention. And, after all, except in the literal fact of your freedom, you are no more a newly-made widow now than you have been since the first day I met you. I am assuming that you care for me; indeed, you have told me so many times, though never quite in the way I wished, nor in just the words I have longed to hear. But I have never dared before to ask for them.'

He waited, his hand nervously stroking his short beard after a way he had when agitated, and all his sensitive face alive with feeling. It was in the courtly nature of this man that he who was so highly placed in a worldly sense, and so accustomed to dealing with large matters and great emergencies, should be timid at this juncture before the woman he loved. He waited for her to speak, but she remained quite still and full of anxious thought.

'I may dare now to ask for them,' he said. 'Only three words which would give me all the assurance I need. Tell me that you love me, my dearest! Then I shall have the right to think for you, to act for you; and it need not be so very long before I can claim the right openly. We will wait the year, if you wish; but I don't fancy it would seem strange to anyone that I should want to make you my wife as soon as possible. I think that by the mere

force of personal character we have conquered our world—you and I. Nobody would say ill-natured things about our relation.'

Again he waited. Dorothea moved and beat her hands together as though the stress of the situation were more than she could bear. She would not look at him. There was a wild expression in her eyes. She seemed to be confronting some invisible thing which beckoned to her, and her face showed half yielding, half terror.

'Don't tempt me!' she said hoarsely.

'Tempt you! It's not a question of temptation. I love you; I want you to be my wife. There never was anything wrong in my love for you, or in yours for me—nothing that you mightn't have told outright to your son. But now we may own it honestly to the whole world; and what reason is there that we should not take the happiness that Fate offers us?'

'There—there is a reason,' she stammered, and got up as she spoke. 'Oh, I am tortured! I'm cut in two! If I were a worse woman than I am I'd marry you. I'd deceive you into believing that I am what you think me. But I can't do it, Ravage—I can't do it! You wouldn't want me even for a friend, far less for your wife, if you knew me as I really am.'

Ravage got up too. He had turned very pale.

'Tell me the truth, Dorothea.'

'I cannot! You try me too hard! Can't you see that I am face to face with an awful temptation? No, I never would say in the past that I loved you in the way you wished, for that wouldn't have been true; and though you may not believe it by-and-by, I have wished not to be false in spirit to you. I think I have cared for you with my soul, but not with this self. At any rate, this is true now—I do care for you well enough not to marry you.'

Her manner, if not actual words, put fresh hope into

him. Men will never understand a woman's distinction between self and soul in the matter of love, especially if they be good men. Lord Ravage told himself that she had never allowed herself to think of him as a lover in the material sense, and that feeling in her had atrophied. He fancied also that she was swayed by some mistaken notion of loyalty, some foolish idea of worldly disparity between them.

'If you love me well enough to consider me in that way,' he answered, 'then you love me well enough to be my wife. I am not afraid, if that is your only reason.'

'No, it is not my only reason—far from it. I know what you are thinking. The fact that you are a great man and that I am a poor artist would not weigh with me, if there were not another reason—one that is insuperable. You don't suspect it. You have believed in me too utterly even to guess at it. When you know it—if you ever do—you will see how impossible it would be for me to marry you. But I can't speak of it now. My friend, I'm tired—tired! Have patience with me. I have gone through dreadful things; I am shaken in the depths of me. Yesterday I thought I was going mad. I did go mad for a little while. Now I want to be alone.'

She had been looking down at the hearthrug, speaking in a curiously monotonous tone. Though her words were charged with emotion, the emotion did not seem able to pierce through a certain iron crust in her. As she dismissed him, she lifted her eyes. They gazed beyond him towards the door, and he saw a ghastly change come over her face, as if she were in the grip of some deadly horror. She uttered a feeble cry, and put out her hands before her as though to push away the horror. Ravage turned in the direction of her eyes, and saw Alaric standing just within the tapestry curtain.

The young man's look was very strange and Ravage at once realized that he too, had been going through dreadful things. He seemed to have lost his youth, his lovable bravado—all that had made him Alaric. He walked into the middle of the room within a pace of Lord Ravage, of whom he took no notice, and said, straightly facing Dorothea:

‘I’m glad I’ve heard what you were saying, mother, though it has taken away the little hope I had. I’m glad that you are at least honest enough not to wrong Lord Ravage in that horrible way.’

Ravage stopped him with an imperative gesture, in which there was much dignity.

‘Allow me to say, Alaric, that I am able to defend myself. Between your mother and me there could be no question of wrong. Her wish is mine, whatever it may be. I don’t know how long you have been listening there.’

Alaric shrank as though he had been struck. He turned red for a moment, then very pale, but looked the elder man full in the eyes as he answered:

‘I am not one who listens to private conversations. I came here to put a question to my mother upon which our whole future life depends. I heard you speaking as I turned the handle of the door. I heard you ask her to be your wife. From this I assume that my father, whom I have never seen, and whom I have no reason to respect, is dead.’

‘He died in Baziria last week,’ put in Lord Ravage quietly.

‘That makes no difference to me or to my question,’ Alaric went on. ‘I care nothing about my father. I wish he had died years ago, so that my mother might have married you—or any other man. If the man had been you, I should have been thankful indeed, for I

admire and esteem you, sir, beyond words. I don't think there is a man in England your equal.'

'Thank you; but that is scarcely to the point.'

'Isn't it to the point? No, I suppose not. What I feel about you doesn't really affect the situation. But my mother is right. She can't marry you. If she could intend that, there wouldn't be a woman in the world more base. She won't tell you the reason why she cannot marry you, my lord, but I will.'

'Alaric!'

Dorothea's voice rose in shrill pleading. She cowered like an animal at bay, her figure bent, her hands still upraised, her eyes searching Alaric's face as if for some sign of mercy. But Alaric stood grim and relentless.

Lord Ravage squared himself back, as was his way when baited by an adversary in the House who encroached too closely upon his individual dignity. His eyes gave out that cold gleam of anger known well to his enemies.

'I must decline, Alaric, to discuss the matter with you here or in any other place. You heard your mother say that she wished to be alone. Mrs. Queste, it is best that I should leave you for the moment. I obey your wish, but you understand that I am at your command now and always.' He took her hand and bent over it, touching it with his lips in that courtly manner which made him more than ever like the portrait of a knight by Velasquez. 'Whatever there is to be told, I will hear from yourself. Only this I should like to say, Dorothea—this you know—I am ready and willing to protect you against the whole world—even against your own son.'

'Forgive me, sir,' Alaric interposed, 'but it will be best that you should stay. My mother faces the position, and will agree with me.'

He paused. Dorothea made a motion of her head

signifying assent, and Lord Ravage drew back a step and waited, looking troublously from one to the other.

‘My mother must feel that, the circumstances being as they are, it is best for you to hear the truth now,’ Alaric went on, his voice, from the stress he put upon it, sounding almost emotionless. ‘What use is there in prolonging the agony for any of us? It has to be gone through, sooner or later, and I, for one, want to be done with it. When you do know the truth, you can judge for yourself how far you are able and willing to protect my mother against the world and, as you say, against her own son. But if things are as I believe, there’ll be no more need to guard her against me, for I shall have done my part, and all will be over between us.’

And now Dorothea’s native courage asserted itself. She reared herself proudly, though a knife had pierced her heart.

‘Is it to be so, Alaric, between you and me? You have no pity—no love. Well, I agree with you. It is best that Lord Ravage should hear what you have to say. Ask your question. I will answer it.’

Alaric held out to her the letter which was in his hand.

‘It is this. I have come here to ask whether that is your signature, and whether you wrote the whole of this letter.’

Dorothea took the letter from him, and, with a self-command at which both men marvelled, examined it quietly and critically. She turned it twice over and dwelt some time on the signature. It was as though all feeling had gone out of her, and that white face on which the eyes of both Alaric and Lord Ravage were fixed with an intense anxiety was but a mask of the woman they knew. Presently she put her hand to her forehead and seemed struggling to recall something that had escaped her

memory. After a few minutes of absolute silence in the room, she raised her head and said as coldly as a hardened criminal might have answered a judge :

'I admit that this is my signature, and that I wrote the whole of this letter. I have been trying to think by what possibility it came into your possession. I suppose that Sebastian Blythe stole it as he stole some other letters from this room.'

She walked deliberately to the fireplace and held the letter above the flame.

'Now, after that acknowledgment, and as this letter was never posted to the person for whom it was intended, I have a right to consider it my property and to destroy it.'

She dropped it, standing very erect as she did so, into the heart of the fire.

'It has done its work,' said Alaric. 'Kaia Aldenning has read it, but I saved it from the eyes of her father—you will be glad of that.'

Two crimson spots appeared on Dorothea's cheeks, and she winced as the knife went home.

'But perhaps I ought to tell you,' Alaric continued mercilessly, 'that Mr. Aldenning has in his possession some letters written to you by the man for whom that one was intended. No doubt they are those which you said just now were stolen from this room, and if Sebastian Blythe was the thief, he shall answer to me for his act.'

The crimson marks faded from Dorothea's cheeks ; she drew a gasp of pain, but still stood rigid. It seemed to her that she was afraid to bend herself, afraid to speak, lest that knife in her heart should press unbearably. It was her boy who was driving it home—that was the agony ; her boy whom she had borne and reared, and for whom she had made many sacrifices ; her Benoni, for

whose sake she had lived and worked till Sarel came. The same thought rose in Ravage's breast. The knife had pierced his heart also, and he knew that some terrible revelation was impending, though he had not as yet grasped its true nature; but his chief concern was for Dorothea's pain. Instinctively he went nearer to her, and would have taken her hand, but she refused his sympathy.

'No, hear the rest that Alaric has to tell.' Her voice was metallic. 'You don't know what it all means, except that I stand here arraigned as the vilest offender. Let my son tell you the evil which I, his mother, have done. At least he will not force me to name it.'

'Mother! God help me! I loved you . . . I believed in you . . . and all the time you were deceiving me!'

'And so because I have been a weak woman, and would have spared you the sorrow of knowing me as such—a guilty woman may be, though my guilt, it seems to me, has not been towards you or towards society, or even against Heaven, but against him'—she stretched out her hand appealingly to Lord Ravage—'because I have injured this man, and have played a false part in the world, you, my son, condemn and forsake me. I never taught you Christianity, Alaric, or I might remind you that Christ did not condemn the woman who sinned.'

'Dorothea!' It was Lord Ravage who passionately interrupted her. '*That* is not true of you!'

'It is true. But for Alaric's sake I should not have concealed it.'

At her confession Lord Ravage moved back, extending his arms for a moment, and dropping them with the gesture of a man whom a bullet has struck.

'I will not believe this thing,' he muttered.

'But it is true. I have told you,' she said again, always in the same grating tones. 'You heard me

acknowledge that I had written that letter, which is proof against me. Ask Alaric to whom it was written.'

She stood like a statue, waiting; but Alaric could not speak. He could only give a helpless groan.

'Well,' said Dorothea, addressing her son, though she looked away from him, 'are you leaving to me, after all, the work you were so anxious to do? Why will you not put him out of his doubt? It does not matter that you are taking from me my best friend. You heard me tell Lord Ravage that I could not marry him. Is not that enough? But if you think it your duty to give him my reason, then I can only say, accuse me in full.'

Alaric hesitated. A struggle of feeling showed itself in his face. Up till now the filial sentiment in him seemed to have been killed, and he had not grasped the real bearing, the true horror of the situation he had himself forced. But he would not yield to the faint quiver of compunction which stirred his heart. He goaded himself anew.

'Lord Ravage should at least know this, that while for seven years you have been receiving his political confidences, you have betrayed them to the leader of another party.'

'Alaric!' Lord Ravage's voice rang out sharply, 'I will not stand by and hear you speak such words. I can bear no more of it. And this accusation is false; there was never any question of betraying political secrets.'

'Yet,' said Alaric, 'it is by my mother's doing that you and Gavan Sarel are colleagues.'

'Have done!' cried Lord Ravage.

'Well, there's nothing more for me to say,' replied Alaric drearily. 'You think that I am an unnatural son, and maybe I am. I don't know what sons usually feel under such conditions—I suppose they are common enough. But I always thought my mother different from

other mothers. I admired her so ; I respected her so. I put her so high above all other women. She was just—Doda !’

The boy’s speech broke in a sob, and a trembling went through all his limbs like that of a cord pulled tensely. Dorothea, too, at the sound of that familiar word of endearment gave a little wounded cry and half held out her arms. But Alaric braced himself to fresh hardness.

‘There’s nothing for me to do,’ he went on dully. ‘It doesn’t seem as if she and I were mother and son now. It was another woman altogether who was my mother, and she is dead. . . . Doda is dead. I haven’t got a mother, and I can’t even feel much about the loss. The world has crashed in on me, and all the people I cared for are swallowed up in the crash. Everything is over—for all of us !’

Again a horrible silence fell in the room ; the very air was heavy with the feeling of irrevocableness. It was as Alaric had said : something had altered the world for ever for the three of them. Neither they nor life could ever be the same again.

Alaric broke the silence.

‘Mother, good-bye.’

Dorothea smiled vacantly ; the smile and the look in her eyes were piteous. She answered in a whisper :

‘Are you going, Ral—going for always ?’

‘Yes. You and I can’t be together any more.’

‘And it’s never to be Doda and Ral—never any more ?’

‘Never any more. . . . Doda is dead.’

‘Where are you going, Ral ?’

‘I don’t know—to New Guinea, perhaps.’

‘But you loved London, Ral. You exile yourself because of me. Oh, what have you now, my poor, poor boy ?’

'I've got the Work,' said Alaric.

'And I!' she exclaimed, with an accent of exceeding desolation. 'What am I to do? Nothing is left me.'

A demon seemed to provoke Alaric.

'You have the Work too. You've made your life. There's not room in it for me. Besides, you should remember that it is not possible for me to believe I ever counted for much in your life.'

She answered nothing to this last stab, but hid her face in her hands and tottered so that she would have fallen had not Lord Ravage sprung to her side and held her against his arm. He made an imperative sign to Alaric that he should leave them. Sorrow and indignation mingled in his look.

'You will think differently of this to-morrow,' he said. 'I find it hard even to pity you. But you don't know what you are doing. You don't know what you owe to her. I know that she would have starved herself rather than that you should have suffered any disadvantage. I know how she worshipped you. Talk of your love! It is a poor, mean-spirited thing which has never been able to gauge the greatness of that nature. But you will realize it, my poor boy, when you have had time to recover the shock of your double disappointment. This very night, perhaps, you will be coming back to implore her forgiveness. I pray that it may be so, and that she will grant it. Go now, and leave her to me.'

Alaric moved to the door shame-stricken, and, as Ravage could see, torn almost in two with compunction and stubborn pride. Had Dorothea called to him, he might have gone and taken her in his arms, and the worst sorrow of their parting would have been spared to both. But Dorothea's eyes were turned from him, and her face was stony. Her own pride resented the pleading of another for her to her son. And so pride met pride

and conquered all else. Alaric would not look at her, but left the room without a word.

With the lifting of his presence the strain on Dorothea relaxed, and she fell into a fit of hysterical sobbing. Ravage placed her in a chair, and soothed and tried to comfort her.

‘He has not really meant to be so cruel. He is young, and youth is always hard. We who are older suffer perhaps more vitally, but we have learned to bear pain better. We have learned, at least, that all things are comparative, and that the whole realization of an ideal is impossible in this world. So that we have to be content with its partial fulfilment.’

She ceased sobbing for a minute, arrested in the contemplation of her own misery by this wide fortitude in him, this tolerant calm which she had not expected, and to which she knew she had no right. It would have seemed natural that he, rather than Alaric, should reproach her; that he should have been relentless rather than her own son. And yet he it was who had remained by her side; he it was who had sustained her. He did not scorn her weakness; his love in its almost divine greatness was lowering itself, expending itself in order that it might take in and support that very weakness.

‘Do not fear that all is over,’ he went on in his manner of sympathetic and yet sterile tenderness. His own life had been shown barren, but he wanted her to feel that he could think of hers. ‘Alaric will repent his harshness. To-morrow—perhaps to-night—he will be with you, begging your forgiveness.’

She shook her head, and said in a hopeless whisper, cut here and there by a dry sob:

‘No; Alaric isn’t like that. I suppose he is right. We couldn’t live together happily again. His Doda is

dead. And you—though you are so good to me—the Thea you loved is dead too.'

He did not answer her for a few moments. It was as though some sort of wrench were going on within him—as though he were bidding farewell to one much loved. And this was in truth the case.

'Yes,' he said presently, 'it is so—I will not deny it. You don't want anything but truth from me. It is true that you are not the same to me as you were—you never can be again. But, nevertheless, there is much left. These things seldom end without bitterness. Here, there is none. I shall be content with my life if it can be of support or service to you. Setting aside the deeper feelings, one has sometimes a craving in the unsatisfactory common ways of life to make one's life a comfort to some other life. So far as I am concerned, nothing on earth shall separate you and me. That is the fundamental axiom of my life's creed. And remember, Dorothea, happen what may, you gave me back my youth during those years of our companionship. That companionship has been very sweet to me. It is a great deal to be thankful for. And the past has this advantage over the future—it is always secure.'

The irony of the phrase, as she applied it to her own case, brought on a fresh convulsion of anguish. Perhaps there was irony, too, in the fact—due to a certain human egotism—that he thought her tears arose from remorse for the part she had played towards him, and he tried to lighten its burden.

'Things are as they are, my dear, and regret is of no avail. That chapter is closed, but I would not have it unwritten, for it has made life brighter for me, and its influence will linger till I die. The Thea I loved with a youthful fervour, unnatural, maybe, in a man of my years, seems to me at this moment a dream-woman; yet I think

I would part with all I possess rather than lose the memory of that dream. So do not trouble about me, my friend. You have given me much. I may indeed say truly—you know the words—"Adieu! Vous ne me devez rien. Je vous dois un beau rêve."

She clung to him closer, struggling to speak, but no words would come; and he held her against his breast, his hand upon her head.

'No, no,' he said; 'it is not all a dream. The Thea I loved is no more, but in her place I have close to my heart a woman very dear—a woman stricken and betrayed, whom I would heal and comfort if I could.'

'You cannot!' He had to bend lower to catch her utterance. 'I have sinned against you too deeply.'

'Your sin, my poor friend, has been that you did not trust me enough. Oh, Dorothea, if you had told me everything that night—you remember—when, as I can feel now, the confession was on your lips, then I would have ordered my heart to bear its load, and I would have put myself aside, and would have tried to give you happiness still in your own way. Who knows, if you had spoken that night, events might have turned differently for you; and,' he added with a faint smile, 'perhaps for England also. But now the happiness which might have been secured has gone past recall, and for us both there remains nothing but to accept fate. I cannot go back to the feelings and longings of two months ago—even of yesterday. The thrilling sweetness of my desire has passed, but in a deep and holy friendship there may still be a true marriage-bond. You say that you have loved me with your soul, not with this self. I understand. Between us there could not be perfect union, for that is only when sense and soul blend in one all-embracing passion. But the soul-love is mine yet, and I claim and keep it. You need me, Dorothea, now more than ever

before. As my wife I can protect you. The storm will surely go over, and peace will come to you. We have both our work to do in which each can help the other. Alaric was right; there is always the Work. And you and I have much besides to fill our lives, and to give us the promise of quiet joy.'

His voice, deep and sincere, and ever with that note in it of fortitude and resignation to what had been and to what must be, seemed to act upon Dorothea as a spell. Her trembling subsided, and her bosom ceased to heave so distressfully as it had done against his heart. Yet in those moments of tumult there had come and gone a crisis such as decides the soul's fate not only for mortal issues, but for eternity. She had wrestled with a devil, and the devil had left her now a victor, but with no strength even for thanksgiving.

In her silence and her stillness he believed himself answered, and, bending down, kissed her forehead solemnly.

'This seals the pact between us, Dorothea,' he said.

Then a new courage came to her, and the calm steadfastness of heaven-inspired resolution. She slowly raised herself from within his encircling arm, gently removing with one hand his hand from her head, and, getting up to her full height, stood beside his chair, gathering words with which to answer him. She was not looking at him, but away into space, where it seemed to her a divine influence hovered. She could not see the radiance, but she felt that the Influence sanctified the room, and was driving forth those malign forces which had lately filled the atmosphere.

It was borne in upon her that this power of which she had felt dimly conscious was, as it were, a messenger descending from the Great Heart of Life to replenish and lift and strengthen the impoverished hearts below. And Dorothea sensed feebly the highest of God's mysteries—

the mystery of love and sacrifice upon which rest the foundations of the world. So there came to her a faint shadowing of this spiritual truth, that human love which forgives wholly and forgets its wound and its desire in another's pain, becomes, as it were, the Body of the Divine Soul; and in its union with the Source of Life creates a Force which shall feed and sustain itself and the beloved—a Force paramount, that takes tribute from all other Powers, and before which men and devils must bow in submission.

‘Dorothea,’ Ravage said, ‘may I, then, go as your promised husband and ask Mr. Aldenning to give me those letters of which Alaric spoke?’

Her answer came unfalteringly.

‘No, my friend—my dearest, closest friend always, but never my husband. I thank God that He has given me strength to resist that temptation. And, oh, I pray Heaven to bless you for having lifted me out of the mire, for having given me back hope and self-respect. See,’ she went on, ‘I am no longer bowed down with misery and shame. I can stand straight and face whatever comes; yes, and welcome it as the end of my long expiation.’

‘Expiation!’ he repeated with a puzzled smile. ‘Why use that word? It is not like you, Dorothea, to exaggerate a mere transgression of the conventional code. One higher than conventions laid no sin to the charge of the woman who transgressed; you yourself said so. I am no moralist; indeed, I would almost say that I am no Christian. I cannot pronounce any manner of judgment on the moral question. It is too complex—love, sympathies, affinities, on the one side, a code of convention on the other. In any case I have neither right nor desire to make myself the champion of the code and the conventions. But this I do feel to the bottom of my heart. The

woman who suffers here for love, deserves no Heaven-inflicted penalty.'

'It is not that,' she said. 'I did not mean expiation for the doings of this life. In that life it is towards you that I am most guilty. You don't understand yet,' she went on gently. 'Some day it will be given to you to understand as it was given to me last night when I read back into other lives, and saw the seed sown of which I am reaping my harvest of sorrow. Then the closed door will be opened for you also, and darkness will roll away from the past, and a thousand years will truly be but as yesterday, and as a watch in the night.'

'The never-ending problem and the old solution,' he said musingly. 'Well, why not that solution as well as any other? It satisfied the Greeks, and it should satisfy me, for I am Greek in spirit, as are you yourself, Dorothea. Do you remember my once translating for you the lines :

"Who knows if that be life which we call death,
And life be dying?"'

'And life be dying,' she said after him. 'There is no dying. It is yesterday and to-day, and night between, on and on, for age upon age, with always hope for the morrow. Oh, I get giddy as I think of it; and it seems to me at this moment that my yesterday is more real than my to-day; and that my to-morrow dawns even now upon me—to-morrow in which the penalty will have been paid, and in which the temple doors will open, and the crown of the Initiate be regained once more.'

Her eyes seemed now to shine with some pale reflection of a transcendent glory, and he saw that her mind was rapt and absorbed in one of those curious waking dreams of which he had never been able to give himself a satisfactory explanation, but which he accounted for on the theory of artistic inspiration.

He was glad to think that here, at least, she might find refuge from the tragedy which encompassed her, and, unwilling to call her back by any disturbing word to mundane realities, he silently kissed her hand and left her alone with her dream.

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Dorothea sat in one of those strange half-trances for several hours. No one came near her. It was a law of the house that when the studio door was locked she was never to be disturbed; and with the dread of this acting subconsciously, she had got up as one might in sleep and had drawn the bolt. At the same time she had put wood on the fire, for in this subconscious way she knew that the cold made her shiver. Dusk fell; then it grew quite dark, and through the studio window she could see the lamps twinkling out, one by one, along the Embankment. Once, the door was tried, and the gong sounded for dinner, but there was no one to dine. The maids felt a little anxious and puzzled; nevertheless, not one would have dared to force the door. They were accustomed to a certain peculiarity in the ways of painters, authors, and such-like people; and when Dorothea did things out of the common, they were put to the count of artistic aberration. It was a saying downstairs that artists are always queer, and that when the fit was on them anything might be expected. So the servants only vaguely conjectured that Mrs. Queste had a sudden order or a sudden inspiration, and was working it off.

Perhaps it was the sound of the gong which roused Dorothea from that curious condition of insensibility to her surroundings. She had not been seeing visions; she had not been asleep; it was only that her whole physical being was in a state of quiescence, and that the less material part of her was liberated from the flesh, and

suspended, as it were, between two worlds. When she came back to her ordinary consciousness it must have been ten o'clock. She had the sensation of wanting air, though at the same time she felt cold. The fire was nearly out, and she threw on logs, and then went to the big window to open it.

Down on the Embankment newsboys were shouting, and there was so little traffic that she could hear quite distinctly what they were saying. It seemed to her that before she heard the words she knew what they were going to be. By one of those flashes of recollection which often made her realize in her normal condition that she had been acting in what Charafta called her 'dream-body,' she knew now that while her natural body had been motionless in the chair, its senses numbed, its faculties asleep, her dream-body had been actually present at the scene at Westminster to which the bawling of the newsboys referred: 'Sensation in the House of Commons! Serious charges against Mr. Sarel! Probable break-up of the Ministry!'

Yes, she knew what it all meant. She knew that, after question-time that day, Eustace Olver had moved the adjournment of the House, according to the prescribed formula, for the discussion of 'a matter of urgent public importance.' She knew that the Hagan Magrath letter had appeared in that afternoon's issue—a special and early issue—of Eustace Olver's paper. She knew that before three o'clock London had been ringing with the scandal, and that almost every member on his way to the House had bought a copy of the paper and had read the letter in full, and that those who had not done so had been told the news by their fellow-members. She knew that Gavan Sarel had become aware of the accusation when he had opened a delayed letter on his way to the Aldennings' house, and that thus the first dagger-thrust had

been dealt before the second one descended and broke all the life-force in him with which to repel this, as it seemed to him, attack of fate. All this she understood with that dream-brain of hers, which for ten seconds functioned with an extraordinary lucidity, then seemed smothered in a dense cloud which blotted out the rarer, keener existence. But before the cloud fell she had one lightning vision of Sarel, standing up in his place by the Ministerial bench, facing his enemies, baited, howled at, but defiant—defiant with the reckless courage of a beaten man who has no more to fear from Destiny because she has done her worst. . . . And all the time the newsboys shouted, and the cry grew hoarser and fainter in the distance. ‘Disgraceful revelations! . . . Ministerial crisis imminent! . . . Expected resignation of Mr. Sarel!’

So it was too late. For the second time she had delivered him to the beasts.

In the life of Dorothea Queste that hour which followed was the darkest.

Dorothea was held in the grip of that old horror. Truly, the Roman woman who had seen the lion spring upon the man she had loved and betrayed did not suffer a more bitter remorse than this woman of To-day, whose part in the drama was now played out and her expiation complete. She recalled the dying curse of Demetrius Othanes upon Herennia. . . . Would Sarel come now to curse her as he had cursed her then?

Yet the deed had not been wholly of her doing. The incriminating letters had not been in her possession. She had not sent them to Kaia and to Sarel’s political enemy. Her own part in the matter she had quickly repented, and would have done away with, had she been able. It was not her fault that she had slept and forgotten, and that the retractation of her permission to Sebastian Blythe—

wrung from her in her frenzy—had arrived too late. The clear reason of the woman saw this through her pain and penitence. In veiled fashion she recognised the workings of that Higher Power which guides men's destinies to ultimate good, and which, holding the balance even, wills that it shall not weigh to this side or to that, but that retribution shall fall in unerring proportion to the offence, and that in measure of the motive shall punishment be meted to the act, so that falsity shall receive falsity, and betrayal call forth betrayal, unless love, and love alone, reverse the scale, changing the lesser for the greater Law. For the Law of Love is mightier than the Law of Justice, and to Love shall all powers and dominions yield, whether of earth or above the earth. Thus, through Love may the evil become good, the injury be altered to benefit, the curse transmuted into blessing.

These thoughts were as the welling-up of that Divine Wisdom taught her in ages gone by, before lower longings had obscured the clear vision. And with them a deeper sympathy, a holier yearning, a purer love, swept into Dorothea's heart, driving out that which had been unworthy. The human love for Sarel, which she had believed killed in the night, rose reborn, but in nobler form.

Instinctively she prayed, scarce knowing to what God, but with the soul within her reaching up to the Great Heart of Life, and seeing always the picture of the closed door, and, in her fancy, behind it the benignant Face which had haunted her childhood's dreams.

'Master,' she prayed, 'let me suffer, but let him go free. Let me bear the penalty, but lift it from his head. Give me desolation for my portion, but grant him the joy for which he longs. Restore to him Kaia. Restore to him his lost power. Render him fourfold all of which I would

have robbed him. Hear me, Master, and accept my atonement. In sorrow will I go down to my grave, renouncing all human joy, so only that he may gain his heart's desire—so only that though I be cursed he may be blessed.'

As she prayed she seemed to hear again Charafta's words: 'Know that nearer to you than lover, husband, son, stands Asphalion.' And as she prayed more fervently still, she became conscious of a pure embracing blueness, deep as the innermost vault of heaven, and in the heart of that blue depth, that ineffable stillness, her soul seemed to shelter itself under the wings of the Divine, in a peace for which this world has no similitude.

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The sound of a grating key, an opening door; a gust of wind stirring the curtain above the models' staircase; a step creaking the wooden stair, recalled her to a sense of actuality.

She knew the step. Often in the silent hours she had watched for it, waiting till midnight chiming announced that the House had risen. At the sound, her heart had been wont to throb in eager longing; now it beat in wild terror. She knew that the blow had been struck. Had he come to curse her? How could she convey to him her pity and her penitence? How could she meet his reproaches, how make him understand that the whole nature of her had changed, that she would give him back Kaia at no matter what cost to herself?

Fear thrilled her anew as she saw the curtain drawn aside, and a few paces from her stood Sarel.

For a moment she doubted the evidence of her physical senses, the sound of his footsteps, the lifting of the curtain over the doorway, the sight of him as he stood silently gazing into her face. So strange was he, so pale, his eyes

so wild, that she thought it must be his ghost come to denounce her.

His silence lent itself to the illusion. For fully three minutes not a word was spoken. Then a movement on his part, a step or two forward, a gesture—that trick he had of tossing back the gray lock which overhung his forehead—convinced her that this was a living man and no wraith.

She fancied from a certain stealthy motion of his right arm that he had a weapon concealed, and that he meant presently to strike. With the physical fear her splendid courage rose. She looked at him steadily. There was the queer, cunning glitter in his eyes that she had noticed before, but he seemed to be looking through her at something beyond.

'Gavan,' she said, 'have you come to kill me?'

He made no answer. She went on speaking very quietly, but with all the strength newborn of her renunciation vibrating in her tones.

'Gavan,' she said, 'if you wish to kill me you may do so. I am not afraid. I would rather die by your hand than live on knowing that you hated me, and that the only memory you had of our past love, which to me'—the voice faltered—'is life and redemption, was as of an evil enchantment from which you were thankful to have escaped. But listen to me first. Let me tell you what I will do—what I can do; I am sure of it—to atone for the evil you have suffered through my love. Then perhaps you will not hate me quite so bitterly.'

The uneasy glitter in Sarel's eyes gave place to a calmer expression, but it was one of hopelessness, tragic in its intensity.

'There is no atonement that can be made. There is nothing to be done. All is ended,' he said.

Dorothea went to him, holding out both her hands as

she might have done to a beaten child whom she wished to soothe and comfort. The momentary physical fear she had felt was now gone.

‘Come to me, Gavan, and we will consult together,’ she said firmly. ‘Let me talk to you for a little while. Don’t shrink from me. Since last I saw you here, when you cast me away with loathing, I have gone through a strange experience. I have learned something of God’s workings, and I, too, have sounded the depths of suffering, and have lost everything that would have made life dear and valuable. I, too, am shipwrecked, stranded, alone. But don’t think that I am appealing to your pity, that I am trying to lure you back again. It isn’t so. In this world, as long as life lasts, there must be a gulf between us. I don’t want you to put your arms around me and kiss me as you did yesterday. Your kisses belong to Kaia—to the woman you love best. I give you to her freely. I only wish now to help you that you may keep Kaia’s love. I only want to get back for you that which you may think you have lost because of me. I only want to make atonement—to you, and to God.’

The cold despair of Sarel’s face was lightened by a look of faint wonder, a touch of more human feeling.

‘It is not like you, Dorothea, to speak in this way. I don’t seem to know you. People talk like that of God when they are about to die.’

‘It may be that is true. I told you, Gavan, that I was not afraid to die.’

‘No, you were never afraid of anything. I always respected and admired that quality in you. I, too, was a fighter—when the power of men opposed me. In courage we were akin. I remember that I said some cruel things to you when last I was here. I should like in part to retract them. I don’t think it is true that I loved only your beauty and your intellect. There was something else

in you that I must have cared for, though my supreme desire was that Kaia should be my wife. But the gods willed otherwise. Is it the eternal conflict in man between the rebel and the law-abiding citizen, between Ishmael and Isaac, between the mistress and the wife? It does not seem possible that a man can love two women. I know that I loved Kaia, and with a totally different love from that which I felt for you. And yet I know also that my fate is inextricably bound with yours, and that as our bond has been broken, so my star has set. It was written! Useless for us two to strive against each other. Better, maybe, it would have been had we fought on together in spite of all.'

The cold, measured sentences chilled Dorothea to the soul. She had verily the sense of an impassable gulf separating them, across which their souls might not meet. But the unselfishness of her love made a bridge. She went nearer still, and took his hand in hers.

'Come, Gavan, come and talk to me. We may at least be friends. Come near to the warmth, you feel so cold; you look so pale and ill. When did you last have food and wine? Let me get you some; it will strengthen you after all you have gone through.'

He shook his head impatiently. But her womanly solicitude for his commonplace need did more than anything else to relieve the tragedy of the situation, and made their relation more simple and natural. She led him unresisting to the sofa, and persuaded him to drink some port wine which she took from the cupboard where a supply of nourishment was always kept for the support of exhausted models. At this moment, when, as she got out the wine, some mechanical toys and a box of sweetmeats fell scattered upon the floor, and the jests he had sometimes made about her models' larder recurred to both, it was difficult to believe that the terrible scenes

of the last thirty-six hours had really taken place, and that the sweet habit of old did not again hold them in thrall. And some feeling of this sort was in his mind, for at first he yielded himself to the familiar spell, gazing round in a bewildered manner, as though he were vaguely conscious of a want of harmony between the outward and the inward, yet for the moment tried to ignore it.

He submitted to her tender ministrations much as he might have done in the old days, when he had come worn out after a battle in the House. Never, even in those days, had Dorothea loved him more truly. Never, even in the times of weariness, and perhaps defeat, had her heart so yearned to him with that mingled tenderness of mother and wife always to be found in the true love of woman for man.

But in this gush of tenderness her resolution did not waver nor her courage falter.

His mental faculties, she saw, were paralyzed by the strain he had been undergoing. His eyes never lost their dazed expression, and, when he spoke, his speech, notwithstanding the absence of emotion and the almost judicial balance of his reasoning, was curiously thick and halting in utterance. Presently he seemed to recollect himself, and got up with a jerk which threw the wine-glass he had laid down on to the tiled hearth and broke it into fragments. He leaned against the mantel-piece, and a sort of rigor seized him, so that he shook in his limbs, and clutched at the back of a chair for support.

‘The broken glass!’ he muttered. ‘It is an omen in our family. And I am the last of my name. None will come after me.’ He looked at her wildly. ‘I used to try and pretend that I was a man of action, and that physical exercise was the best way of dispelling morbid

matter. I used to boast that I had not any superstitions, but it isn't true. I am a Celt—I have always been a Celt to the core.'

She was awed by the look on his face, and said nothing. After a minute he went on :

'The broken glass—the fallen star. . . . The star . . . you remember—*qui file—file—et disparaît*. My star has fallen. I am a doomed man.'

Then, rousing herself to combat this strange mood in him of hopeless resignation to what he believed supernatural decrees—a mood of which hitherto she had only seen faint traces, and of which she had not really gauged the hereditary grip, the physiological as well as the psychological significance—Dorothea caught Sarel's hands, and, holding them against her breast, appealed to him in passionate earnestness, forgetting entirely in his need her own sorrow, her own betrayal, her own desolation. Her eyes, steadfastly fixed upon his face, compelled his shifty gaze ; but when his eyes met hers she knew that they did not see her face, but a deadly spectre beckoning beyond.

'Gavan,' she said, 'you must not give up hope. You must not think that your career has ended and your star has set. It is not sunk—it is only for the moment in eclipse ; and if you have strength and patience it will shine out again more gloriously than ever, and will lead you to the very heights of power—and of love. Listen : you have told me often that in difficulties I have been able to comfort and sustain you, and I will come and sustain you now. You have said often that my advice in some political crisis has helped you, and I will give it to you now—give it to you from the bottom of my soul, where I know it has been truly inspired. Face your enemies. Face them in the House of Commons and on the public platforms. Admit that Eustace Olver has

ground for his accusation, but tell the story of Sebastian Blythe's treachery and of the disappointed place-hunter's intrigues. Would Olver have bought Sebastian's stolen goods if Ravage had offered him a seat in the Cabinet? . . . Do this, Gavan, and I will do my part also. I, too, will denounce treachery, and lay bare hidden motives. I am ready to tell my tale of a jealous woman's revenge. See, I do not flinch. This shall be my atonement. And I know the nation's heart. It will rise at the voice of a woman who pleads against herself for the man she has wronged; and the political issue will weigh far less than the human sentiment. But be as you have always been—fearless. Be the gladiator of the House, though you are fighting for yourself in the wrong, and not for public or private injustice. Own up to the Hagan Magrath negotiation. Acknowledge the error—call it what you please—the indiscretion of a young, ambitious man entering public life and snatching at all means to attain his end. Call it even disloyalty to England—to the Government—to the country. Plead mistaken loyalty to a false ideal; plead the Celtic inheritance you spoke of; plead perverted sympathy for a down-trodden cause. Appeal to the national courage, the national chivalry, the English national spirit which won't see a man hit when he is down, and which will stand by the culprit who condemns himself.'

Her voice was a clarion cry, but it did not stir Sarel. He said nothing, but gazed still in that unseeing way as though he were searching for the track of the fallen star.

'Take the blame,' Dorothea went on. 'Bear the penalty. Resign at once. Place yourself at the mercy of your constituency. If need be, withdraw for a time from public life. But that will not be necessary. I have faith, as I said, in the national heart. Stand up against fate. Fight. Fight and conquer.'

Dorothea paused again, waiting for him to speak ; but still he made no answer. And the knife in her pierced. Ambition, the motive force, as she had believed, of his life—the force stronger than had ever been his love for her—failed to rouse him. What, then, was left? Would his love for Kaia prove a stronger spur than even ambition? She spoke again :

‘Gavan, I know what you are feeling—that the career matters nothing to you, and is not worth fighting for without Kaia’s love. You are afraid that Kaia is lost to you. You believe that she must turn from you in horror now that she knows . . . knows . . . what you have been to me. But, Gavan . . .’

Dorothea bent down, and in a movement, restrained, and yet with utter outpouring of herself, put her lips upon his hands, which she held clasped between her own against her bosom. The touch of those lips, cold now as stone, and meeting, as it were, marble still colder, thrilled Sarel as her kisses had never thrilled him in the wild days gone by, for now the emotion with which she inspired him was of the spirit rather than of the earth. Dorothea went on :

‘Gavan, you don’t know yet of how much real love is capable. You don’t know yet how tender a woman’s heart can be—how forgiving, how all-embracing . . . even . . . even when it is not loved the best. . . . And when it *is* loved the best—when it has for its own possession the purest, truest heart’s affection of the beloved—ah! then do you not think it would rise to the greatest heights, that it would love and trust through everything—through misfortune and calumny, and even through seeming falsity?’

A choking sound came from Sarel. She looked up at him, and saw that he was deeply moved. His face was gray, drawn ; his eyes were bent down upon her, and they

had not their former unseeing expression, but seemed full of living sadness, and were suffused with tears. Dorothea knew that she had at last touched the mainspring of the man's nature, and she thought that this was his love for Kaia. Now the last throes of her renunciation were endured.

'I know . . . I know . . . you are afraid. . . .' She found herself whispering brokenly. No ring of sound would come into the words, and yet she seemed to be using all her strength to utter them. 'You feel that after . . . all that has gone, Kaia will not believe in the sincerity of your love. And perhaps it might be difficult even for you to make her realize that you do love her best. You think she could not be sure . . . and there is no one who could convince her. . . . But there is one person, Gavan. I can convince her of your sincerity. I can make her understand. If she were to doubt you, she could not doubt me. Women are able to read women as men cannot do. Listen to me. . . .' Her voice gathered volume. 'Have no fear on that count. Kaia loves you—she must love you; and if, loving you, she resists my pleading, she will be more than woman. I will go to her. I will tell her how it all came about between you and me, and in such a way that she will no longer blame you. I will take the blame on myself, if there be blame in such a case. I will tell her how lonely my life was; how miserable my marriage; how from the first I loved you; how gradually I made myself necessary to you—that is true, is it not? . . . and intrigued—yes, intrigued, for that is true too—intrigued to win you. I will tell her how I won you against yourself; how I . . . held you . . . against yourself. . . . I will tell her that you did not deceive me by false promises, but that you told me plainly you would not marry me if I were free. . . . That also is true. Do you remember the night on which I put

the question to you, and . . . you answered it? You did not know that it was a test of you, that I put it because I had heard a few hours before that my husband would not live many months—he died last Monday. All this I will say to Kaia. She will believe me. How should she not believe me? As woman to woman I will lay myself bare. I will abase myself to the very ground before her. I will give her every proof, every promise that it is in my power to give. . . . She will believe me, and she will take you again to her heart, and you will be happy in her love and in the home you long for and the children she will bear you. . . . Then I will take myself out of your life. I will leave London, and you will be troubled by me no more. I shall not be unhappy. . . . I . . . have loved you . . . but . . . I do not love you any longer . . . in the same way.'

Her head sank again, and he felt her tears upon his hands as she unclasped hers from them. She did not kiss them again, but the drops that fell seemed to scald his flesh.

He gave an inarticulate murmur. At first she could not distinguish the words; then she thought it was her own name he was repeating.

'Thea! . . . Thea!'

'Gavan,' she cried, 'speak to me. Tell me that you will follow my advice, that you will trust me to win you back Kaia. Tell me that you will be in your place in the House to-morrow, ready to confront your enemies and to defy them with the truth.'

'I will tell you.' He spoke hoarsely, still with that curious thickness of voice, stopping here and there between the sentences, which, though fairly even in the beginning, he brought out, as he went on, in excited jerks, and with a certain difficulty of utterance peculiar and alarming. 'Your advice is good; it was always good. In part I

have anticipated it. I did stand forth and confront my enemies. I did defy them, as you said, with the truth. I did appeal to the great heart of Britain, not for mercy to my fault, but for mercy to its own sins, for redress of its crying injustices, for the righting of its national wrongs. I spoke as I had never spoken. A frenzy seized me. The spirit of the old prophets was upon me. . . . And I held them. My finger was on England's pulse. . . . I felt it rise ; quicken ; leap to fever-beat. I knew that I had carried the House, and that I could carry it again. I knew that I could sweep the country with my battle-cry—cleanse the sepulchre. . . . I know that even now I should have strength to fight, and to conquer, if but my old superstitious faith in the power supporting me lived still . . . if only I could see my star shining as of old and leading me on to victory. But my faith is slain ; my star has set. . . . Gone out in a blaze of glory ! . . . Those were the words I heard, and I recognised them as the edict of Fate.'

'The words!' Dorothea repeated. 'What words?' She realized that the man's mental balance was swaying, and tightened her own grip. 'Who said them, Gavan? For whoever did so, they were false!'

'No, they were true. . . . Who said them? The Immortals sometimes choose strange mouthpieces.' He laughed—a wild quaver, and the queer gleam was in his eyes. 'Though you are a very clever woman, Thea, and I've relied upon your judgment many times—more often than you know—still, you cannot set your judgment against the will of the Immortals. That would be foolish, and not like you, for it was always you who were superstitious . . . not I . . . until now. No, do not be impatient, Thea. I will explain everything to you . . . my triumph, and my doom . . . for I am a doomed man. . . . I know it. . . . That's what I came to tell you. My star

brought me here . . . before it went out, that we might be together . . . at the last.'

'Gavan!' The inward strength made her speak firmly. 'Tell me what happened this evening in the House.'

'Great things. History will write of them. I don't ever remember such a scene. The men hooted, yelled, acclaimed. They jumped on the benches, they waved their hats, they went mad—Tories, Liberals, Progressivists alike. Among them all, Ravage only stood calm. . . . Some shouted "Hero!"—more, "Traitor!" and some called for my arrest, and some tried by force to hold me down; but, like Samson and the Philistines, I flung them from me; and, like Samson in my downfall, I will pull down the pillars of the House with me. . . . They impeached me, that's what it came to—impeached me on the charge of treason against the Crown and the country. . . . And I stood forth, as you now bid me, Thea, and acknowledged myself a traitor. . . . Yes, *I am* a traitor—to the Crown, to my country, to the God within me.'

He reared himself, and spoke with some faint touch of the past eloquence.

'*I am* a traitor. . . . To the Crown, because I take its wages, and bow myself in its mummeries; when, if I had been true to my convictions, I should have devoted all the strength in me to destroying that symbol of falsehood and oppression, that counterfeit emblem of what was once Divine Right—Patriarchal Government by inspiration from on High. . . .

'*I am* a traitor. . . . To my country, because, though I have found and tasted the sweet wholesome kernel at the fruit's centre—the germ of a nation's vitality, I have not dared to tear away the outer gilding and expose the rotten husk which is putrefying it to the core and poisoning the nation's life. . . . I have not dared . . . I own

it . . . save in so far as exposure served political expediency . . . the personal end. . . .

‘And I am a traitor to the God within me . . . because, though the Divine Voice has spoken, I have not obeyed its mandate. I have worshipped the Idol of Ambition, not the Spirit of Truth. . . . I have in my own life been false to every ideal . . . the ideal of the State . . . the ideal of the Household . . . the ideal of . . . Love.

‘And so my doom has come upon me, and it is as the Immortals will, when the Instrument they have chosen fails of its uses. . . . And I knew this thing as I went out from amidst the crowd, which slunk like a pack of cowed bloodhounds on either side of me . . . as I went out into the night and silence. . . .

‘I walked the Terrace . . . as I have walked it many times after the heat of political turmoil, before coming here to you. . . . And all the false lights on the bridges and the banks glittered and made a double diadem that was reflected in the gray river . . . meretricious . . . mocking . . . unlasting. . . .

‘But above, the stars shone. . . . The wind has swept the sky. . . . It is a clear night, Thea. . . . There are no clouds, and there is no moon. . . . And there was Orion. . . . And there were the pale sweet Pleiades. . . . The place was lonely at first. . . . Gradually it filled. . . . Groups of members talked together; they were talking of my speech. . . . No one recognised me in the dimness. . . . I seemed a thing apart from the world I had just left. . . .

‘It struck twelve. . . . I do not know how long I had been there. . . . The Watchman called, “Who goes Home?” . . . And I said, “I am going Home.” . . . Then I heard two men speaking . . . the words I told you of. The men were Pat O’Leary and Herbril—my henchmen, who have followed me through fair weather

and foul. Herbril was the Immortals' mouthpiece. . . . Herbril—the blind, faithful political dog. . . . He said . . . "*It is ended.* . . . A great career closed. . . . A sun gone out . . . in a last blaze of glory." . . .

'And I looked up into the sky, and my star shone. . . . It left its place. . . . It moved in the heavens. . . . It looked like your eyes, Thea . . . bright and loving. . . . And it led me . . . and I followed it . . . through Palace Yard among the lamps and the noise of cabs and carriages, and by Lord Beaconsfield's statue, and the gray old church, through the streets and by the river. . . . I followed it till it stopped above this house. . . . I stood and looked at it. . . . I looked at my star, it seemed so bright and so kind; I did not think it meant to set. . . . Then, suddenly, in one great blaze of glory it spread and sank . . . sank . . . leaving a little trail of light . . . and then that disappeared. . . . It sank above your house. . . . It brought . . . me . . . to . . .'

The word was never spoken by mortal lips, but Dorothea knew what at the last he would have said.

The man's body seemed to collapse strangely and quietly. The speech had become more and more indistinct. Then had risen a sudden flush upon the deathly paleness. A trembling shook the limbs. The hand he had put out to grasp at a chair, his nearest support, relaxed, and he fell, almost in a sitting posture, his head against the cushions of the sofa.

For a minute he breathed stertorously. Then all was still.

During the rest of the night Dorothea remained beside her dead. Part of the night she was not alone. A man stood near her, whom she knew by inner knowledge to be Augustus Charafta, though not in his fleshly garb of To-day. He was of taller stature, of more spiritualized aspect and imposing mien, and wore the white woollen

robe of a priest of the Roman period with which she was familiar. The form, notwithstanding a certain impression of unearthliness it gave, was distinct, and clearly recognisable as that of the Augur Umbritius.

His face was bent slightly forward, and seemed to have caught the glow of another world. The arms were upraised, and the whole attitude and expression suggested a prophet or seer of old time, as when, in the inner chamber of Asphalion's temple, he had invoked the ghosts of Dorothea's Roman life, or when, as the Greek high-priest, he had called down the goddess's blessing upon that kneeling multitude which spread green offerings before Demeter's shrine by the Ægean.

A majestic figure, his face full of tenderest compassion, the deepest sympathy in his eyes, but something of solemn joy in his smile, Umbritius stood silently watching her for several minutes, her only companion save the dead. Then he spoke, and as he spoke it seemed to Dorothea, though no other form was discernible, that they three, the living and the dead, were not alone, but that behind the figure of Umbritius, distinct from it, yet enfolding it, was a Presence, radiant, undefinable, from Whom shone the Light illuminating the Seer's countenance, by Whom the Seer's words were inspired.

'My daughter,' Umbritius said, 'do not grieve, but rather rejoice. Rejoice, for in the Book of the Records it shall stand no more against you, "*In pain and failures and disappointment shalt thou seek the Path anew. Thou shalt pass the Portals, but only across thy slain self. Thou shalt reach the goal; but the watchword of two dreary lives shall be Expiation.*" I recall to you the words of the sentence,' Umbritius went on, 'that you may know it is now fulfilled, and henceforth blotted out for ever. The expiation has been made. The goal is within your sight. The self has been slain.'

And as he spoke, it seemed that to Dorothea's spiritual vision there was conveyed the symbol of the Closed Door, no longer barred against her, but an open portal through which streamed the heavenly Light. Again the Seer spoke :

'Out of dying life comes, and the life is Love. Only when Love seems to be slain and dead, does It arise triumphant, deathless. Though the man you love lies in his mortal body dead at your feet; though your renunciation may appear to you unavailing, and hope be quenched in your heart, know that the beloved one, whom by sacrifice you have made your own, is yours through all lives to eternity. Know that the love which you would renounce for the sake of the beloved becomes a possession that neither men nor angels nor devils can take from you.

'For Love, mightiest of all powers, is in its purest forms undying. It is the eternal Force which upholds the universe, which sustains life from its lowest shapes to that one you inhabit; which draws souls together through age after age, and comes as a crown to men and women—not to men and women only in human form, but to spirits far above them, whose greatness you can but dimly comprehend. Over earthly love made perfect—over love which through suffering has reached Divinity—the grave has no jurisdiction. By such love, through pain and sacrifice, you have attained. In slaying the personal desire you have gained the immortal crown of deathless love. And though the man to whom your heart cleaves seems to have gone beyond your ministrations, he needs now as much as ever your tenderness and your care. During his life you struggled with forces that would have dragged him from you; and even had you overcome them, and compelled him to be yours in the flesh, his spirit

would have escaped you. But now that he has passed into the region where only spirit can dwell, he waits for you. Death is but the gate of life; so, too, it is the gate of Love, perfected and immortal.

‘I have told you that Gavan Sarel, though dead, is more truly yours than he ever was while living. And this is no vague, illusive promise, but a true and definite reality. Thus shall it be.

‘In the body of dream you shall go forth to meet him. In the life of dream you shall teach him as I have striven to teach you. So teaching him, strengthening him, lifting him, loving him, you shall find the rich fruition of your desires in ultimate union on earth and in heaven with that soul which you have made your own, to win and to hold through all eternity.

‘The spirits that pass from this little life stand but a step or two beyond. To you it is given to know the truth; to realize that your arm is not shortened, but that its grasp may stretch to the hither world. To you it is given to understand that the power your renunciation has wrought in you and for you, shall enable you now to meet your beloved in a communion which shall know no mortal limitations.

‘Passing on in the body of dream to the land where he awaits you, you shall find in that communion joys untellable. In that communion you shall realize all that your love has gained and is gaining for you both. Not in vain the bitterness, the sorrow, and the mourning, for through them your spirit shall rise ennobled and perfected. It shall rise strong to sustain, not only the daily earth-trials which may yet come upon you, but strong to sustain and draw up higher with you, the soul that is immeasurably dearer to you than yourself.

‘Thus hereafter, when both are fitted to enter, the Closed Door shall open for you and for the man you

love. Then may you pass together through those portals to the Higher Life of which you have now not the faintest comprehension. There may you join your strength in lifting those who follow upon your footsteps, and in leading them onward through the Gate of Love Eternal.'

THE END

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